

# Walsall & Willenhall CHRONICLE

Thursday, April 27, 2017

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## THE SPICE IS RIGHT FOR FAMILY-RUN FIRM IN AWARDS HOPE



Owner Sanjay Aggarwal and his mother, Shashi Aggarwal

A FAMILY-RUN spice business which operates from the kitchen of a suburban house in Walsall is in line to win a major award for small companies.

Spice Kitchen began after a discussion over Christmas dinner in 2012 when Sanjay Aggarwal came up with an idea for his parents, Shashi and Ashok, who were becoming a little bored in their retirement.

The idea was for Shashi to sell her high quality spices and homemade spice blends online. Sanjay created a listing on eBay, photographed her spice tin collection and listed it online on Christmas Day. They had their first sale within 24 hours.

They later listed products on other channels, set up their own website, and by ex-

panding their range of products as well as creating a one stop spice shop, expanded quickly and organically, launching to the trade in September 2016 with a now rapidly expanding list of UK stockists.

The business also supplies spices to a number of chefs as well as other UK artisan producers, including butchers, chocolatiers and bakers. Spice Kitchen has now been named as a finalist in the 'Legacy' category in this year's Small Awards in association with Facebook, an award which has been established to recognise the achievements of small and micro-businesses.

Sanjay said: "We are so happy to be selected for the Small Awards and in particular for the Legacy Award. Our business is

very much a family business and at its heart is the spice knowledge passed down from my grandmother to my mum and from her to me. We are really looking forward to an amazing night and a chance to meet other small business owners."

Spice Kitchen will find out if it has won the award at a ceremony in London on May 25 hosted by comedian and television personality, Sue Perkins.

One of the individual category winners will also be named overall Small Business of the Year and Facebook will give that business £1000 worth of free advertising credit.

For more information, visit [www.thesmallawards.uk](http://www.thesmallawards.uk) or follow on Twitter @thesmallawards.

### CRIME

## Axe attack on man during burglary bid

BURGLARS attacked a householder with a baseball bat and an axe as he battled to protect his home in Aldridge.

The 57-year-old tried to keep the three men out of his home in Grettton Crescent when they smashed a kitchen door window in the early hours of the morning.

As he fought to keep them out he was hit with a baseball bat and what West Midlands Police believe was an axe.

The men all left after striking the man, who was then taken to hospital by a friend and treated for his injuries. He was released shortly after treatment.

Nothing was stolen. Anyone with information about Saturday's incident is urged to call 101 quoting 20WS/83200B/17.

### EMERGENCY

## Lucky escape after car rolls four times

TWO men were lucky to walk away from a crash after their car rolled over four times on a country lane.

Ambulance crews said the two casualties, in their 20s, were saved by the roll cage and the fact they were wearing seatbelts. Their car careered through bollards near the junction of Church Road and Church Lane in Walsall Wood around 4.30pm on Sunday before coming to land on its roof.

Both men escaped serious injury although the passenger was taken to Walsall Manor as a precaution.

### DONATIONS

## £40,000 on way for good causes

A TOTAL of £40,000 obtained from criminals has been allocated to a dozen good causes in Walsall. West Midlands Police's Crime and Commissioner David Jamieson has pledged the financial injections from the Active Citizens Fund.

A project for a new community art piece in Caldmore called 'Dreaming the Green' received the top amount along with a scheme called Keep Chucky Tidy to reduce litter and fly-tipping in the area.

While £4,750 was pledged to drive down hate crime in the borough and £4,000 to help protect EU migrants from child sexual exploitation and employment exploitation.

### INSIDE

## BEAUTY OF THE BLACK COUNTRY



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# Watchdog wants meeting with chiefs over patient delays FEARS ON MANOR BED-BLOCKING

A HEALTH group has said it has concerns over the number of patients having their discharge delayed at the Manor Hospital.

Healthwatch Walsall is also seeking a meeting with hospital bosses after the Chronicle's sister newspaper, the Express & Star, reported on the lengthy delays some patients were facing before leaving.

One 82-year-old patient spent at least an extra 288 days in the hospital, and was still in there on Monday of this week, despite being declared medically fit to be discharged. Another patient left the hospital 64 days after being declared medically fit to leave.

In total more than 50 patients in the last three years stayed at least 28 days longer in the Manor than they needed to.

In light of the figures, Simon Fogell, chief officer for Healthwatch Walsall, said: "It gives us fair concern seeing the number of delayed discharges. I will be seeking conversations with the Manor. In 2015 we published a report looking at the number of discharges that resulted in readmission and it was only in July 2016 that the public accounts committee put out a report showing how people were facing long delays and how much that was costing."

Mr Fogell added: "We want people to have confidence in the Manor. We want to make sure people are getting a good service. I will be asking questions to Walsall Council and the Manor on why it is not working."

Philip Thomas-Hands, chief operating officer at Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust, which runs the Manor, said: "We try our best to ensure timely and effective discharges. To help support this, we have developed a permanent discharge lounge facility at the Manor Hospital with staff aiming to complete as many discharges as possible before midday."

"However, delays can occur for complex reasons, some beyond our control."

Community leaders have welcomed the news that the plans are set to be accepted.

Councillor Ian Robertson, who represents the Blakenall ward, said: "I am particularly pleased that affordable housing will make up a good percentage of the development, allowing people to get on the property ladder."

## Circus to wow crowds in Darlaston



The Circus Funtasia, which has set up at Rose Park in Darlaston. The cast are all ready for the big show

WITH amazing acrobatics, eye-popping juggling and even extreme motorbiking, all the fun of the circus has rolled up in Darlaston.

Fresh from a stint in Aldridge, Circus Funtasia is continuing to amaze audiences at George Rose Park until Monday, featuring a 13-year-old juggling act, a hula hoop act, a clown, a tightrope walker, motorcycle riders and many more.

Performers from Bulgaria, France and Spain

will perform at the renowned touring circus. Rosie Clarke, who is responsible for press and marketing for the circus, said everyone is excited.

The circus will move on to Lichfield and King'swinford before moving up to Manchester and returning to Cornwall for most of the summer. The show lasts in Darlaston until May 1. For more information, visit [www.circusfuntasia.co.uk](http://www.circusfuntasia.co.uk) or call 07706168507 for tickets which start from £10.



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# Family loses second pet to poisoning



Family pet Ollie who has died

A FAMILY cat has been killed by poisoning just months after his owner's other feline pet died in the same way.

Two-year-old Ollie died when he drank a large quantity of anti-freeze.

Owner Corinne Dubberley, who lives in Millard Road, Bilston, has been left devastated after her black and white shorthair died, despite best efforts to save him.

She said: "He could hardly walk so we put him straight into the cat box and took him to the vets, where they said he had been poisoned. They tried to flush

it out but he deteriorated quickly. They could not save him."

Ollie is Ms Dubberley's second pet to be killed by anti-freeze poisoning after she lost her other cat, Jess, the same way in January.

She also claimed there had been three other cats in the area who had suffered the same fate in the last 16 days.

RSPCA animal welfare officer Elaine Williams said: "This is a very upsetting incident, which has resulted in the death of a much-loved family pet."

"At this stage we do not know if these

were accidental incidents or deliberate but in the meantime we would ask everyone in the area to check where they keep their pesticides and chemicals and make sure they are secure and out of the way of cats.

"If anyone has any information, please contact the RSPCA on 0300 1238018."

Pet owners have been urged to be vigilant. If cats are showing symptoms of poisoning, the advice is to take them for veterinary treatment immediately. Signs include vomiting, appearing drunk, seizures and difficulty breathing.

# Town hall to be leased out for just £1-a-year

A 'NEGLECTED' town hall is set to be leased out for just £1 a year after a charity pledged to invest £250,000 in order to fund improvements.

Walsall Council bosses are poised to approve a 25 year lease to see Darlaston Town Hall handed over to the Murray Hall Community Trust at a 'peppercorn rent'.

Proposals put forward by the Sandwell-based trust includes plans for the development of a community centre at the site, which dates back to 1888.

Darlaston Boxing Club holds weekly sessions there, while two weekly leisure groups and a dance and social club also use the 300-capacity site.

Those groups will get to stay and plans mooted by the trust include bringing in similar clubs, as well as a cinema club, job clubs, training sessions for volunteers and even potentially the creation of a local history museum on the site.

## Activities

Paul Gordon, head of business change at the council, said: "Murray Hall Community Trust will invest £250,000 aimed at improving the facilities and development of a wide range of activities for the benefit of the local community."

"The trust aims to make optimum use of the facilities to enrich the lives of local residents."

"The trust's desire is to work closely with the 'third sector' and will directly involve the wider community in the running of the town hall."

Tony Marshall, who runs Darlaston Boxing Club, said: "I think this will be good for the community and for the clubs who use the site, it is welcome investment."

The site is currently run by the council but the authority has been looking for a voluntary or community sector organisation to take over its management for some time.

The Trust is also involved in supporting The Well food bank and the Working Together scheme, which helps people over 18 find training and job opportunities. Doug James, councillor for the town, said: "It is a long time coming, it has been awful to see it neglected for so long."

# Who will be Miss Black Country?



Girls from the local areas get set for the final of Miss Black Country

JUDGING for who will be the next Miss Black Country is under way, with finalists put through their paces ahead of this weekend's final.

The 14-strong group had to tackle the sports round, as well as a Black Country quiz when they met in Dudley. Although some preliminary judging has taken place, the last day of the contest will be this weekend when a winner will be crowned. On Sunday the group met at the Copthorne Hotel in Brierley Hill for the first stage of judging.

They were met by Miss England regional director, Rachael Barker, before meeting the judges, including last year's Miss Wolverhampton, Faye Campbell. They were tested on intellect before tackling a quiz about the Black Country and taking part in a modelling round.

Ms Barker said: "The ladies have all worked so hard for the Miss Black Country competition so far, all raising money for Beauty With a Purpose, a charity helping disadvantaged children."

Miss Black Country will be crowned this Sunday at the Copthorne Hotel, for tickets, [www.missenglandwn.com/tickets](http://www.missenglandwn.com/tickets), or call Ms Barker on 07783 444320.

The 14 finalists are: Aisha Shahreen, Bethany Davidson, Carla Turner, Ellie Raybould, Eve Mallen, Evie Azzopardi, Faith Broome, Hannah Mitchell, Imogen Grace Collins, Isobel Lines, Leonie Constance McIntosh, Natasha Preece, Sophie-Rose Dickinson and Victoria Green.

# Your chance to have say on number plates move

WEST Midlands Police is urging people to have their say on its use of vehicle number plate recognition devices.

The survey is seeking people's views on the technology that enables officers to track and trace a vehicle using its number plate.

The ANPR Public Engagement Survey is now available online.

A statement on the survey reads: "West Midlands Police are working to engage with members of the public around the use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR)."

"Your views and experiences are vital to the production of a meaningful strategy for the force. We recognise that a partnership approach will be the only way to deliver lasting solutions. Therefore consultation is key."

Following the questions, participants are then told why ANPR is used and how.

The survey states: "Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology is used within West Midlands Police to help detect, deter and disrupt criminality at a local, force, regional and national level, including tackling travelling criminals, Organised Crime Groups and terrorists."

"ANPR provides lines of enquiry and evidence in the investigation of crime and is used by forces throughout England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland."

To access the survey and to take part, visit [wh.snapsurveys.com/s.asp?k=149190625419](http://wh.snapsurveys.com/s.asp?k=149190625419)

# Pensioner dies after collision

A WALSALL pensioner involved in a suspected hit and run has died in hospital.

The 80-year-old man is alleged to have been struck by a silver Mercedes on Lichfield Road, Walsall, last Wednesday morning, near to Rushall Care Home. Police said he passed away at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham on Friday afternoon.

A 41-year-old man, of no fixed address, has been charged with causing serious injury by dangerous driving, failing to stop at the scene of an accident and for having no insurance. He appeared in court on Friday and has been remanded in custody.

Officers are appealing for anyone who saw the car between Ablewell Street, where it was involved in a theft, believed to be of petrol, around 10.50am, and Brundard Close in Blakenall, where it was found abandoned around 2.40pm, to come forward.

The car suffered 'extensive windscreen damage' and would have been 'very distinctive', according to police.

Det Sgt Paul Hughes, from the Regional Collision Investigation Unit, said: "We are supporting the man's family at the sad time and our thoughts remain firmly with them."

Anyone with information is asked to contact DS Hughes on 101.

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# Hate crime in region at lowest level for 2 years

HATE crime in the West Midlands has fallen to one of its lowest levels for two years, new figures show.

There were around 250 incidents recorded in the region in January – the third lowest monthly total since the start of 2015. It follows a sharp spike in reported hate offences immediately after the EU referendum last year.

Hate crime is any incident in which the victim's race, religion, sexual orientation or disability is thought to be the perpetrator's motivation for committing the offence.

West Midlands Police recorded just shy of 500 hate offences in July last year – the highest ever – in the aftermath of the historic vote to leave the European Union. But it dropped sharply to under 350 incidents in August and went down a further 100 offences by January this year meaning it was at a level lower than throughout most of 2014.

In the days after the EU referendum, Chief Constable Dave Thompson said: "We did not see a significant rise in hate crime in the days immediately following the referendum result. I need to be clear we will absolutely not tolerate crimes of hate."

Nationally there was a 58 per cent increase in reporting after the referendum which prompted senior officials to request weekly figures. However, the numbers recorded soon dipped back to normal levels, police bosses said. Forces normally see a spike in reported hate offences in July.

# 'False' memories fear on photos

NEW research has revealed more than four in 10 in the West Midlands believe they may have created a false memory after looking at a childhood photo.

The research by security retailer safe.co.uk suggests social media may be making false recollection worse, with 90 per cent of those surveyed being 'social cynical' and believing people only keep or upload their best pictures. From this, people create false 'happy' memories, according to the retailer.

Professor Martin Conway, head of psychology at City University London, said: "The new research has shown us just how fallible memory is and the use of social media is actually contributing to this false recall."

# Village fun day out for all the family

FAMILIES will be praying for sunshine at the Rushall May Fayre on Monday May 1, with performances from singers Carla Yates, Miss Fortunes and a steel pan band, as well as a classic car show. The free event will be at Rushall Playing Fields in Rowley Place, from 10.30am to 4pm.

# Inspectors raise court cells concerns

COURT custody facilities across the West Midlands need to improve, according to prison bosses.

HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP), led by chief inspector Peter Clarke, has raised 'significant concerns' with court cells and the way people are handled in courts in the region.

Among the concerns include the 'often unnecessary' use of handcuffs and detainees spending long periods in cells waiting on solicitors.

A report prepared by Mr Clarke after HMIP toured facilities across the region in December stated: "The

application of handcuffs in the physically secure court custody facilities was often unnecessary.

"There was a listings protocol, and we saw a number of cases in which children and vulnerable detainees were prioritised. However, several factors contributed to too many detainees being held in court custody for unnecessarily long periods.

"These included: delays in the attendance of duty solicitors and court interpreters and detainees being brought from prison early in the morning to Crown courts, when their

cases were not listed until the afternoon.

"Investment in many parts of the estate was required in order to address some of the unacceptable conditions we found for detainees."

Inspectors also found 'significant amounts' of graffiti on cell walls some of which was 'offensive'. However the courts were also praised for their 'good' working relationship with key agencies and their 'adequate' level of staffing.

Mr Clarke's report added: "Working relationships between the three key

agencies responsible for delivering the court custody provision were good. It was positive that the key stakeholders, in particular HM Courts and Tribunals Service, accepted responsibility for the overall care and welfare of detainees. As with other recent inspections, the provision was hampered by ineffective delivery of the cleaning and maintenance contract, for which none of the involved agencies was directly responsible.

Speaking after his report released, Mr Clarke said the inspection had been 'reasonably positive'.

# CCG joy after it is moved out of special measures

**WALSALL Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has been taken out of special measures, NHS bosses have said.**

NHS England has taken the CCG out of special measures following improvement in its financial performance and governance.

In the CCGs' Annual Assessment for 2015/16, published last July, Walsall CCG was rated 'inadequate'. Serious concerns were raised over the group's finances as it battled to find savings of more than £20 million in just one year.

Since then, NHS England has been working closely with Walsall CCG to help manage its financial recovery and strengthen its governance.

Alison Tonge, director of commissioning operations for NHS England in the West Midlands, said: "It is essential that the people of Walsall have confidence that the CCG is able to commission safe, sustainable health services now and in the future.

"The announcement means we recognise all the work and progress that the CCG has made so far on governance and financial management in particular.

## Reassurance

"We will continue to work with Walsall CCG over the coming months to ensure that all remaining actions are completed."

Walsall CCG hailed the news as 'excellent' and thanked staff.

Dr Anand Rischie, the chair of the CCG, said: "This is excellent news and it should give patients, the public and our partners reassurance that we are continually improving local health services. Thank you to the governing body, our staff, our partners and to NHS England for their continued support and guidance.

"We recognise that there is still much work to be done and we will continue to work closely with NHS England and local partners to make the necessary improvements."

Paul Maubach, the accountable officer for the CCG, added: "We are pleased that special measures have been lifted but we know that there is still much more work to be done to ensure that we continue to improve local health services for the people of Walsall.

"Our focus will remain on ensuring the provision of safe, high quality services for the population of Walsall whilst delivering good value for money and effective performance."

## Keyed up for Bat Out Of Hell role



Pianist and conductor Robert Emery, from Pelsall, who is heading to London with Bat out of Hell

AS a small boy playing his piano along to Top of the Pops at his Pelsall home, Robert Emery dreamed of hitting the big time.

Now a professional conductor and pianist, he has landed a role working on the Bat Out Of Hell musical – one of the UK's biggest new stage shows.

He was chosen by Grammy Award-winning record producer Jim Steinman who was behind Meat Loaf's Bat Out Of Hell

album back in 1977 – one of the best-selling records of all time.

Forty years after its release it has been converted into a stage show with 34-year-old Mr Emery conducting the music.

Mr Emery, who has worked on musical projects across the world including working alongside Russell 'The Voice' Watson, has been conducting the show at the Opera House in Manchester since January before it heads to London Col-

iseum for 56 nights from June 5.

The former St Michael's Primary School and Blue Coat Church of England secondary school pupil said: "It's been a dream of Jim Steinman's to put Bat Out of Hell on stage for years."

"I was chosen by Jim to conduct the music each night and it's been a real privilege and honour."

"The set is the largest I've seen and the production is massive. I think the budget is £17 million."

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### April joins crop of salon finalists

A HAIRDRESSING apprentice at Walsall College is competing against the finest crop of talent in the Midlands. April Morgan, 18, an advanced level three hairdressing apprentice at Boyd's Hairdressing, Design in Can-

April Morgan

knock, is just one of 20 budding hairdressers who have made it through to the regional heat of the Wella XPO-SURE.

April impressed judges with her photographic entries of commercial cut and colour looks. Top prizes in the competition include £1,000 of Wella Professionals training vouchers, a £500 tool kit, a chance to work with a top hairdresser for the day and educational support for a year.

### Historic house's summer tours

FAMILIES are being encouraged to take a tour of a historic house this summer. The Manor House Museum, on Hall Green Road, West Bromwich, is holding free summer tours every Sunday from July 30 to September 10.

The tours run from 11am to 3pm. Visitors will be given the chance to explore the 13th-century building, try on armour and play medieval games.

It will also provide an opportunity for people to see some of the house's rooms as they might have looked in the late medieval period.

The tours last around an hour and start at 11.30am and 1pm. There is no need to pre-book. Refreshments and cream tea will be available.

### Food firm set to appear overseas

A WILLENHALL food company is to exhibit at a trade show in Cologne for a second time. Middleton Foods, supported by the Department for International Trade in the Black Country, first appeared there in 2015.

Thanks to an exhibitor grant from the Black Country Chamber of Commerce the company, cooked British fish and chips for all the visitors and served thousands of portions over the five days of the show.

This was Middleton's first overseas exhibition and was research to gauge the size of the market for their products outside of the UK.

### Focus on Camra dates

THE Walsall branch of the Campaign for Real Ale is inviting members to an open meeting at The Duke of Cambridge in Short Heath on May 2 at 7.30pm. The presentation of its cider pub of the year award will be at Chase Inn, Brownhills, on May 6 at noon, and members will visit Walsall Cricket Club on June 24 to present the branch club of the year trophy.

There is one small job that you have been meaning to do for years -

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COUNTY NEWS

45pc increase in temp vacancies

DEMAND for temporary professionals in the West Midlands has risen by 45 per cent in the year to March, according to the Association of Professional Staffing Companies.

The data, provided by recruitment software company, Innovantage, revealed that in addition to a rise in temporary roles, permanent vacancies also experienced an increase, rising 18 per cent for the year.

Demand for professionals rose notably across sectors including IT and media, which recorded uplifts of 38 per cent and 14 per cent respectively.

Charity steps up in bowel cancer fight

A POLL commissioned by Bowel Cancer UK's Step up for 30 fundraising challenge has revealed 64 per cent of adults living in the Midlands were not aware a lack of regular physical activity increased the risk of bowel cancer.

Research shows regularly taking part in 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity, such as cycling or fast walking every week, can decrease your risk by as much as 12 per cent.

A recent survey revealed more than 20 million people in the UK did not reach or exceed the minimum target. For more information, log on at [www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk/stepupfor30/](http://www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk/stepupfor30/)

Jump for joy with inflatable course

THE world's longest, continuous inflatable obstacle course will visit Wolverhampton later this year. The course, which is more than 1,000 feet long, is on a UK tour will be at Wolverhampton Racecourse on June 30 to July 2.

They will host events where teams of five will compete against each other in a timed competition. Trophies will be awarded for the fastest three teams each week. Full details at [thelabyrinthchallenge.com](http://thelabyrinthchallenge.com)

House woes having an impact on health

MORE than one in four adults in the West Midlands suffer mental health issues due to housing problems.

The report from Shelter and Com-Res shows 28 per cent have experienced problems including long-term stress, anxiety and depression due to a housing problem.

Anyone struggling with bad housing and homelessness in the West Midlands can contact Shelter Birmingham on 0344 5151800 or go to the website, [www.england.shelter.org.uk](http://www.england.shelter.org.uk)

German market dates

DETAILS for the ever-popular German market in Birmingham, the biggest of its kind outside Germany and Austria, have been announced. This year's market, known as the Frankfurt Christmas Market, will start on November 16 and finishes earlier than last year, on Christmas Eve.

Nearly £350,000 paid out over damage

DRIVERS in Staffordshire have received nearly £350,000 in compensation in the past four years because of potholes – with new figures revealing the worst roads in the county.

Figures obtained in a Freedom of Information Act request show Staffordshire County Council shelled out a whopping £347,389.60 between 2012 and 2016 to drivers whose cars were damaged because of the pothole

problem plaguing the county's roads.

The figures also reveal the problem roads around the county, including Junction 11 of the M6, Envile Common Road in South Staffordshire, Keepers Lane in Codsall and Burnhill Green Road near Pattingham.

The single highest payout for a driver came in 2014 when one motorist received £4,621.65 after a collision with a pothole at the junction

of Somerset Road and Kent Road in Stafford. Another mammoth payout came in 2015 when one driver received £3,574.98 in compensation after their car was badly damaged on Langley Road on the outskirts of Wolverhampton.

Cannock Chase councillor Gordon Alcott, who previously claimed there must be a pothole on every road in the district, said: "The one before for the

toll road has got a series of craters, that is how bad they are. Then the island for junction 11 itself has potholes all the way around it. Motorists are having to try and weave their way around them, it is very dangerous."

In total 3,985 successful and unsuccessful compensation claims due to potholes were submitted to Staffordshire County Council between 2012 and 2016.

Potholes: Motorists are paying the price



MOTORISTS are paying the price of the crumbling roads across the region our potholes campaign has uncovered with drivers contacting us to reveal damage being caused to their cars.

We have received a number of images of damaged tyres and alloys caused by vehicles hitting potholes as readers highlight some of the worst roads in Staffordshire and the Black Country.

And a Freedom of Information act request has shown how much is being paid out in compensation by Staffordshire County Council because of our pothole-ridden roads.

Councillor George Adamson, who represents the Hednesford and Rawsley areas which have been highlighted as a concern by readers, has welcomed the Chronicle's campaign.

He said: "I welcome the Chronicle's Top of the Pots campaign. It highlights one of the major concerns of local people. Staffordshire has become the pothole capital of England.

Invest

"We need to invest in improving our roads and do it urgently. Staffordshire residents deserve nothing less. The pothole plague has to be dealt with, and sooner rather than later."

This week reader Sue Gulley has told us of damage caused to the wheel and tyre of her car after hitting a pothole in South Staffordshire.

She said: "The hole was full of water so we never saw it. The road is very bad, Hilton Lane.

"We were on our way to attend my Dad's 80th Birthday meal with family at Coven and due to the incident we had to cancel.

"My husband was filthy having to change the tyre at the side of the road and by time we had done this was not worth us going, an event which meant a lot to all of us and was ruined due the council not dealing with issues that have already been reported to them, the road is a disgrace.

"I pay my road tax, why should I then pay for a repair that was caused due to no fault of my own. I shall fight for my money back. "

Russell Withey suffered damage to his wheel when he hit a pothole near Gentleshaw Common in Staffordshire, as drivers turn off Chorley Road into Com-



Raymond Drury is complaining about potholes in Romsley Road, Stourbridge



Sue Gulley measures the depth of the pothole which caused damage to the wheel and tyre of her car

monsie Road. He is still waiting to hear if he will be compensated for the damage.

Simon Hall of Anson Road in Great Wyrley also sent in pictures of the terrible condition of the roads near his home.

Raymond Drury emailed us pictures of potholes in Romsley Road, Stourbridge. He said: "What is interesting is that the council have been repeatedly repairing holes here for over 20 years as there is some form of water leak underneath.

"A clue for the council 'cure the water leak first'."

Reader P Garrett flagged up problems on the A4601 in Cannock at the island which meets the A5 and added: "Both carriageways are covered in



Russell Withey suffered damage to his wheel from a pothole near Gentleshaw Common



Simon Hall of Great Wyrley sent in pictures of the terrible condition of the roads nearby

about 10 potholes and there's nowhere to drive around, you just have to let the car take a battering."

The Chronicle has been inundated with reports of huge potholes and badly damaged roads since launching our campaign a month ago. We want to identify the top 10 pothole blackspots in the region to flag up to our councils.

If you know of any pothole-ridden routes or deep holes email details, preferably with a picture, your name and any comments you would like to make to [Sue.Attwater@expressandstar.co.uk](mailto:Sue.Attwater@expressandstar.co.uk) or drop us a line at Editorial, The Chronicle, 51-53 Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES.

More than 200 people charged over stab attacks

MORE than 200 people in the West Midlands have been charged with stabbing offences in the last three years, according to a police report.

The report, released by West Midlands Police, revealed that a total of 227 across the region were charged with stabbing offences since 2014 – 76 of these were from Wolverhampton.

In Sandwell, 64 people have been charged, with Dudley having 45 offenders and Walsall 42.

In 2014, Wolverhampton saw 22 people charged for stabbing offences, rising to 29 in 2015. Last year, the number of people charged fell to 25.

According to the figures, a total of 11 people in Wolverhampton last year were charged with using a kitchen knife in stabbing offences, whilst two used a lock knife and 12 used what has been deemed 'knife unknown.' A total of 35 kitchen knives were used in offences from 2014 to 2016.

Kitchen knives were the most used weapon used in the recorded offences. In Sandwell, there were 20 instances where kitchen knives were used where offenders were later charged. In Walsall, 13 knives were used from 2014 to 2016 in offences where individuals were later charged and 13 were also used in Dudley in this period.

Walsall has also seen an increase in the number of people charged with stabbing offences – from just 10 in 2014 to 17 in 2015. However, there was a slight decrease in 2016 to 15 people charged.

Leader of the Conservatives for Walsall, Councillor Mike Bird said: "I think that knife crime is a problem across the UK. Unfortunately, it seems that these idiots carry a knife for bravado and then with a moment of provocation, bravado can quickly turn into tragedy."

Police appeal for help in manhunt

POLICE have launched an appeal to track down a man who is wanted on recall to prison.

He is being sought after breaking the conditions of his release.

Hubert Locke, aged 38, is from Aldridge, and reportedly absconded from an address in Stonnall Road on Friday, April 14.

Police officers are keen to locate him as soon as possible.

Locke is a white man, standing about 5ft 8in tall, of medium build and with short dark hair.

Officers believe that he is now in Worcestershire or the West Midlands areas.

Anyone who sees him, or knows of his whereabouts, has been urged to contact officers at West Mercia Police on 101.



Hubert Locke

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## 'No quick fix' warning by group on child poverty

A GROUP set up to tackle child poverty in a Black Country borough has said the problem is expected to rise and warned there are no 'quick or easy fixes'. It is estimated that 16,000 children are living in poverty in Walsall, which is the 27th most deprived area in the country.

Last September, Walsall Council put together a working group to look at tackling the issue, who will report their initial findings and ideas at a cabinet meeting on April 26.

The group has listed identifying families at risk of falling into poverty due to welfare reforms, working with housing providers, promoting free school meals and not charging people under 25 council tax as some ways in which the situation can be helped.

The council's cabinet were due to discuss the Child Poverty Working Group's findings this week.

Councillor Liz Hazell, lead member in the group, said: "It is important to acknowledge that child poverty continues to generate significant discussion and debate locally, nationally and globally. Over many years, this issue has led to thousands of reviews, papers, policies and strategies produced by government, local authorities, charities, academics and others.

"Whilst there was a dramatic dip between between 1998 and 2012 child poverty continues to exist and is on the increase. The working group are concerned at this worrying trend but acknowledge that it would be foolish to suggest that there are quick or easy fixes."

## Grace building on her success

A STUDENT at Walsall College has been shortlisted for a national award.

Second year construction student Grace Morgan has been put forward for a national 2017 BTEC Award.



Grace Morgan

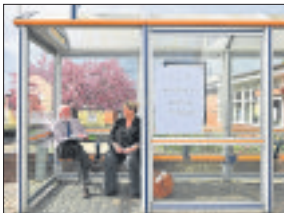
The BTEC Awards, now in their seventh year, aim to recognise individuals for exceptional achievements while working towards their BTEC qualifications.

BTECs are career-based qualifications designed to give students the skills they need to move on to higher education or go straight into employment.

Grace is in the second year of her BTEC Level 3 extended diploma in Construction and The Built Environment and has been offered a scholarship by Northumbria University to study a degree in Building Surveying.

Construction lecturer at Walsall College, Andrew Stubbs, said: "From day one Grace has shown a real passion for learning and a clear desire to develop her skills."

# Councillor's fare advice is non-stop



Councillor Worrall, with Jane Meekie

THE show must go on for one councillor – despite temporary and possible full-time library closures.

Rushall-Shelfield Ward councillor Richard Worrall, who has held over 500 Saturday morning advice sessions for constituents in Rushall and Shelfield since being elected in 2012, held this weekend's Rushall session in the bus shelter outside Rushall Library, as libraries are closed for Easter Saturday.

Councillor Worrall said: "The big thing is to maintain the week-in, week-out, availability so that local

people know exactly when and where to find me every week. I have held my advice surgery on one previous occasion in the bus shelter on Lichfield Road, which is right next to the library and bang opposite Rushall Labour Club. It was something different and we managed to get through it without any problems."

Nine libraries across Walsall, including Rushall Library, could close due to council cuts but some residents groups have already expressed an interest in running the sites on a volunteer basis. Councillor Worrall

revealed last week that residents in Rushall had submitted a detailed Expression of Interest in a community takeover of Rushall Library to the council.

He said: "I am quietly confident that our Expression of Interest will be seen as a good way forward for the site. We have some good ideas and I believe that if we are allowed to take over that it will be a success. My surgeries would be able to continue too, even though doing the odd one from the bus shelter is fine, it isn't going to happen every week."

# Villagers' relief as DX hub scheme withdrawn

**RESIDENTS have been breathing a sigh of relief after DX Freight's appeal against the refusal of its proposed £36 million super hub was withdrawn.**

The scheme, which was earmarked for a 40-acre site off Hobnock Road, Essington, has prompted outrage in the village for 18 months in a stand-off that has rumbled on.

Demonstrations have been held by outraged residents against the plans, which they claim would have been inappropriate for green belt land, as well as increasing traffic, lorry pollution and noise in the area.

Less than a year after South Staffordshire Council refused DX Freight's £36 million bid to relocate its base at Willenhall to Essington, the authority refused scaled-down plans in February this year. A public inquiry was scheduled to start on September 5 after the company appealed the first refusal, however the authority now says DX 'does not plan to take any further action regarding this site and will look for an alternative elsewhere'.

### Overjoyed

Essington ward Councillor David Cliff, who has stood side-by-side with residents in their fight, said: "I am just absolutely overjoyed at this, this is something that has gone on for so long. A lot of people said before the first application that money had spoken and this was a done deal. This proves that money doesn't talk when people work together for what they think is right for their community and I hope other communities can look at what we have done and take heart."

The move would have secured the firm's 550 jobs as well as create dozen more positions.

Other benefits touted included £150,000 to be invested in improving local roads, £271,000 set aside to maintain the development as well as the creation of a wildflower meadow on part of the land which had originally been earmarked for a 'phase 2' expansion in the future.

Tension mounted as members of the planning committee registered their votes electronically at a public meeting on February 28 regarding the site.

Cheers went up from the dozens of residents who had boarded a coach to pack out the council chamber in Codsall, when the result went in their favour – 25 votes against the plans, 15 in favour, with one abstention.

## We're hair to help our family



Olivia Williams, aged 15, and aunt Colleen Ball, with Colleen's sister Lesley, left, and mum Joan, right

A TEENAGER and her aunt have had their hair chopped for charity after two close family members were diagnosed with cancer within the space of half an hour.

Joan Ball, aged 75, and her daughter Lesley Williams, 50, from Walsall, were told they both had thyroid cancer and breast cancer respectively – at the same time and in the same hospital.

The life-changing news came on Friday, May 13 last year. In

an attempt to turn it into something positive, Lesley's daughter Olivia, aged 15, decided to get her hair chopped off and donate it to the Little Princess Trust charity, while raising money for Cancer Research UK along the way.

Her auntie and Lesley's sister, Colleen Ball, 46, promised she'd join Olivia if the fundraising total reached £100. It only took a day and the duo have managed to raise more than £1,200 between

them for charity. Colleen said: "My mom and eldest sister were both diagnosed with cancer so my sister's daughter Olivia decided to get her hair cut for charity."

"She wanted to do a good thing and we've raised quite a lot now. We both had about 14 inches cut off each. I've had it trimmed but not had my hair cut properly for about 15 years – I'm getting used to it now." For details go to [www.littleprincesses.org.uk](http://www.littleprincesses.org.uk).

## NEWS IN BRIEF

## Awareness for dementia event

AN event to mark Dementia Awareness Week will take place next month.

St Martin's Church in Walsall will host the day on May 18. There will be a 60s themed cafe and various community groups are expected to attend.

Two free sessions of dementia awareness training will also be delivered by professionals. It coincides with the church's effort to become a dementia-friendly church.

The event will take place from 9.30am until 1pm. Dementia Awareness Week takes place between May 14 and 20.

## Open day to help plan retirement

WALSALL people are being given the chance to learn more about planning finances for their retirement at an open day. The West Bromwich Building Society hosts the free event tomorrow, at its Walsall branch, Bridge Street between 10.30am and 4.30pm.

An independent financial adviser from Wren Sterling will be on hand to help answer individual queries around pensions, financial planning and investments. Fiona McTeigue, retail manager for the West Brom, said: "It's never too early to start planning for retirement."

## Fear not – scary film festival back

BIRMINGHAM FearFest is being staged at a city centre pub. The convention for fans of scary films and stories on May 28 is being organised by the Birmingham Horror Group at The Gunmakers Arms in Bath Street from 11am to 11.30pm.

Films being shown include the classic Theatre of Blood, starring Vincent Price. Tickets are £15 from <http://www.birmingham-fearfest.co.uk/>

## £500 raised for princess trust

TWO young friends have decided to have their long locks chopped off and raised £500 for charity.

Seven-year-old Leah Walker and

her friend Laicee Foreman, aged six, both had a haircut at Luxe Hairdressing in Great Wyrley in aid of the Little Princess Trust.

It provides wigs and hair pieces for children who suffer hair loss due to cancer treatment.



Laicee and Leah

## Crafts on sale at fair

A BLACK Country church is hosting a craft fair on Saturday. A variety of handmade crafts will be on sale including cards, jewellery and toys at the fair at All Saints Church, Moxley, from 11am to 3pm. It is raising money for Acorns Children's Hospice and for the church's work with children.

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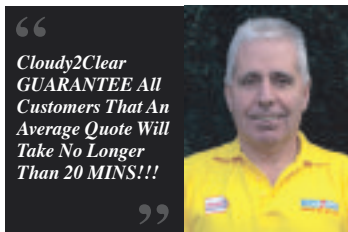
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IN MY VIEW  
with Mark Andrews



# Doormat bags are not that charitable

A COLLECTION bag with a big logo for a cancer charity dropped on the doormat a couple of weeks ago. Having long been a sceptic about the organisations which carry out these collections, I put it back on the doorstep straight away. And despite the bag saying it would be collected the following Thursday, you will not be too surprised to find that it is still in my possession.

Anyway, sick of the sight of the thing, I decided to take a closer look. The small print on the back revealed it was not from a charity at all, but a private company which makes donations from its revenue towards the charity featured boldly on the front.

A bit more digging around reveals the same company has twice carried out unlicensed – and therefore illegal – collections in Bolton. It has also been stripped of its licence to operate in Torfaen, Monmouthshire, after donating just £12.50 to charity from a collection worth more than £250. That is a pitiful five per cent.

If I have any used clothes, jewellery or books that I want to give to charity, I think I will be taking them to my local charity shop in future.

□□□

THE marketing team for nasty American lager brand Budweiser has caused a bit of controversy with its latest publicity stunt, which saw staff roll up in a 4x4 and start handing out cans of Bud Light to vagrants in the street.

I guess that's what they call knowing your market.

□□□

MEANWHILE, down in the Big Smoke a somewhat disgruntled electrician returned a burger he bought from McDonalds, claiming somebody had already taken a bite out of it.

The burger chain has investigated closed-circuit television footage, and says it is a mystery how it happened.

But it does remind me of the time that I bought some pork scratching from a rather down-at-heel corner shop in the Black Country, only to find they had already been opened.

Returning, somewhat unhappily to the shop, I explained to the assistant what had happened. Her reply?

"It'll save yo openin' em, wo' it?"

□□□

THERE are some rather strange special offers on at the W H Smith branch at Heathrow Airport at the moment. One promotion offers 48 Cadbury's Flakes for £45, there is a similar deal on Kit-Kats, while you can also get 24 Bounties for £22. Doesn't strike me as particularly good value, but you always pay through the nose at airports.

I bet whoever buys them will end up sat next to me.

# Remember warning on the unexpected



Theresa May – will she return with a bigger Conservative majority?



Liz Truss announces 'fast track' system to remove foreign deportation dodgers



President Erdogan – success in referendum in Turkey means he can rule as sultan

# Election: We May all be surprised

WE all know what ought to happen. If you believe the polls and rely on past experience, Theresa May will be returned after the General Election with a bigger Conservative majority. Labour will be stuffed and Jeremy Corbyn will be sacked. But these are not normal times and the old rules may no longer apply. So I would not put a large bet on any of the above predictions coming true. And we could do worse in the coming weeks than remember Harold Macmillan's warning of the unexpected things that can upset every plan: "Events, dear boy, events."

JUSTICE Secretary Liz Truss has announced a new "fast track" system to remove foreign deportation dodgers within 25 days of their claims being rejected. We'll believe that when we see it, thanks.

"HUMANITY is destined for eternity, and death is the means by which we reach that joyful beginning," declared an archbishop on Radio Four's Prayer for the Day. If clerics are to be allowed to broadcast such claims, they should at least be obliged to carry the caveat that professional psychics and mediums are forced to display by law: "For entertainment purposes only."

SOME pundits say President Erdogan's success in the referendum in Turkey will give him enough power to rule as a 21st century sultan. This is bad news for his wife Emine who will, of course, become a sultana. But maybe, as his nation's currant leader, this is Erdogan's raisin d'etre. That's enough dried-fruit nonsense.

I WAS walking down a street the other day, clocking the cars on the drives, and realised to my surprise that more than half of them were diesels. So quite how the proposed diesel-scrapage scheme will work is anyone's guess. Figures of up to £2,000 have been ban-

## THE BEST OF PETER RHODES



died about for vehicles more than 10 years old, on condition you buy a cleaner non-diesel car. But who in their right mind would willingly take that sum in exchange for, say, a 2007 Range Rover which still has a book value of £10,000 or more? And can anyone guarantee that this scheme will not be hijacked by Britain's thriving car-crime industry? The theory is that tens of thousands of perfectly sound diesel vehicles will be taken off the road and crushed. But how many will be spirited away in shipping containers, to carry on polluting in some other far smoggier corner of the Third World? Whitehall's bean counters are said to be doing the sums. So, too, I bet are the ungodly.

THE world's oldest person, Emma Morana, has died aged 117 in northern Italy. These so-called supercentenarians rarely agree on the reasons for their long lives. One will advocate being teetotal while another will swear by a daily double whisky. One will praise chocolate but another will say it's all due to pickled shark meat or yak yoghurt. Mrs Morana attributed her great age to her family's genes, two raw eggs a day and chucking out her abusive husband in 1938. Take your pick.

THE usual legion of instant experts has been queuing up on social media to assure us that North Korea's missiles which rumbled through Pyongyang last week are not missiles at all but an assortment of plastic and plywood models. See? You can tell by the wonky warheads. One Daily Telegraph reader claims he saw a similar parade in North Korea some years ago and

the "missiles" were actually made of wood. Now, this may be ringing a bell with some older readers. Back in the 1930s, before the Second World War, one of the most popular urban myths concerned a friend of a friend who had been on a cycling holiday in Germany and came across a military exercise. And guess what? The German "tanks" were no such thing. They were just cars covered with hardboard sheets to look like tanks, with drainpipes for guns. It's just Adolf pulling the wool over our eyes, right? A couple of years later, thousands of Adolf's tanks, with real armour and real guns, swept the British Army aside and conquered France in a matter of weeks.

IF you believe it is possible to knock somebody out with a cricket bat for just a few minutes, rather than killing or merely stunning them, and if you also believe that a young, terrified and drunken teenager can be forced to rape an unconscious woman against his will, then you presumably think the finale of Broadchurch (ITV) was brilliant. The rest of us acknowledge that some of the acting was excellent. But the plot? Absolute piffle.

LAST words on our recent trip to Cornwall. However they may be marketed, The Lost Gardens of Heligan are not all that lost. It only took us 20 minutes to find them.

LIKEWISE, the 'Lost Valley' within the Lost Gardens was remarkably easy to locate. You just buy the map at the ticket office and follow it to the place marked 'Lost Valley'. I may be missing something.

OUR changing language. A kerflaver, invented accidentally by a pal at the weekend, is a cross between a kerfuffle and a palaver. It's a bit like a palfluence.

## TALKING POINT



# Long and winding road is part of holiday

TAKE a look at this family enjoying their ideal holiday, free from the strains of everyday life. There's the children, itching to get onto that golden beach, then there's Mom, telling them to not go too far into the sea, and what about Dad? Well, he's quite happy reading his newspaper, thank you very much.

It's a delightful scene, and one which thousands of families will be replicating this summer (all right, Dad will probably be tapping away at his smartphone apps, but you get the picture). And a picture it most definitely is, because this family doesn't exist. They are actually on a poster above the table where I'm enjoying a pint and a bite to eat in a pub during a well-earned week's holiday.

The poster is a reprint of a British Railways advert from many years ago, in the days when travelling by train to your chosen resort was full of sunny promise.

These days, the station being advertised no longer exists, the site now obliterated by a modern housing development. In fact, the line isn't there either, with little evidence of there ever having been a rail service in that part of the world.

Fast forward to the hectic pace of the 21st Century and far from being part of the holiday, the journey to any holiday destination is merely a means to an end, the aim being to get along the motorway and A-roads in the fastest time possible, not forgetting a break at the services, of course.

However, there can be an enforced treat in store when you least expect it. In my particular case, the motorway was closed, in both directions, due to a lorry fire, necessitating a lengthy detour to get round the blockage. There was nothing else for it but to look for a route that ran roughly parallel with the motorway – which was where the overlooked delights of this island we call Great Britain began to reveal themselves.

Yes, it was a long and winding road with countless irritants such as traffic lights, speed limits, and queues to get through bottlenecks, but it soon started to create an idea of what going on holiday by car used to be like. It wouldn't have surprised me to see a friendly bobbie or two waving cheerily to passing motorists.

The scenery was better for a start, and some of the towns and villages looked as if they actually might be a good choice for a holiday themselves. But in the spring sunshine, the overall impression was that this was where the holiday really started, adding as it did to the mounting expectation.

That family in the BR poster would have approved of this leisurely diversion. I just hope Dad could stay calm in the face of cries of "Are we nearly there, yet?" coming from the back seat.

Wherever you go, and however you choose to get there, remember to make the most of every minute!

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# Golden chance to let your voice be heard

A BOLD election move presents a golden opportunity. This really is a pivotal moment in our recent history because of the circumstances in which it is being held. Arguments have raged since the referendum on EU membership and need to be settled.

The manner of our departure remains a massive area of contention. Bringing back control to our laws and borders may be widely supported.

The Single Market, customs union, security, research, ending free movement require further explanation.

Young people must wonder what

Elections are really all about. No matter who wins they lose out. A huge skills gap exists across the West Midlands, support through benefits, grants and housing have all been lost or cost individuals more.

Youth services and libraries have been decimated and yet many young people are denied the votes to have their say. Now is the time for new thinking and innovation in all areas of government. Returning to the tired 'one size fits all' and policies that failed in the 1980s from both Tories and Labour, will not provide solutions

to our current and future needs. It is not a winning proposition. A Brexit PM seeks a mandate. An eminently sensible decision. Our country needs certainty. We need a new political economy, improved education system and industrial strategy. We should do this with wider agreement. However you decide to cast your vote on election day, please vote.

Please be respectful of other people's views. This is a golden opportunity to back or burst the PM's election wager.

CLLR DOUG JAMES  
Walsall

## Issues not on track for strikes

AFTER reading S Vaughan's letter about railway workers' strikes (15 April), I remain completely in the dark about two issues which the author clearly considers important, but which he fails to elucidate.

One is when the strike took place. I have no idea when the Grand National takes place. It may well be that railway union leaders, as good working-class men, are indifferent to the 'sport of kings' and had no idea that a strike would coincide with the race.

The other, more important, issue is that Vaughan never bothers to say why the railway workers struck. When I was a trade union representative, I from time to time recommended to my colleagues that we go on strike.

Recent railway disputes have usually been about staffing levels, with serious implications both for employees' job security and passenger safety. These reasons are certainly not trivial, and it would never for one second cross my mind to consider such industrial action a reason not to support renationalisation.

ALAN T HARRISON  
Walsall

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### POST

Walsall Chronicle,  
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51-53 Queen Street  
Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

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**Code of Practice:** Our policy is to correct errors as soon as we can. The Chronicles adhere to the Editors' Code of Practice, which can be seen at [www.ipso.co.uk](http://www.ipso.co.uk). If you are unhappy with the accuracy of a story, write to The Editor, Chronicles, 51-53 Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

## Council tax has now become outmoded

COUNCIL tax is outdated. First we had a 'Rateable Value' system, then we had the dreaded Poll Tax system brought in by PM Margaret Thatcher.

The latter was fine when it was introduced, but is now outdated and abused.

1 - With couples trying to get on the homeowners' ladder and cannot afford it, most resort to living with parents to build up a deposit. 2 - Children are growing up, going out to work and continue to live with their parents. 3 - Foreign workers are living as many as 12 or even 15 to one property, in order to cut down on bills and send money home.

Council tax is unfair because it only gives 25 per cent reduction to single

occupancy and does not penalise over occupancy even though everyone of those adults (working or not) enjoy the fruits of the council tax, i.e. police, fire and rescue, upkeep of parks, street lighting and cleansing, etc.

If people with spare bedrooms are penalised financially, then surely the same council tax should reflect the same penalty for 'over-occupancy' and charge per adult, per household.

If council tax was charged per person per household, it would encourage adults of working age, living with parents rent-free (so as to speak), to go out and seek employment.

A PARKER  
Willenhall

## Saddened by opinions

I WRITE in response to the report on Chaseview Care Home and the headline that it could face closure.

We were saddened to read the very negative comments. As in all places there will always be areas which require improvement but in the opinion of a group of us relatives the dedication of the staff in caring for our relatives is superb. The residents are clean, well-fed and cared for and, happy. Looking after the residents is not a tick box exercise, although this appears to be the priority for some.

MR R D JAMES  
Burntwood

## Walsall is in a sorry state

I AM saddened that we have one of the highest shop vacancy rates in England and that too many of Walsall schools are not meeting required standards.

Even relatively minor hiccups like a non-working escalator in the Saddlers shopping centre seem to take weeks to be attended to - causing an inevitable drop in shopping footfall. Let's hope that some new blood on Walsall Council seeks to stop the rot.

GRAEME CONNIGALE  
Palfrey

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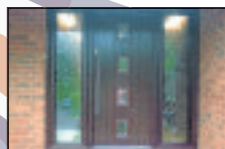
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# Kids club urged to make improvements by Ofsted

**A KIDS' club in the Black Country has been told to improve by the education watchdog.**

St Giles Kids Club, based at St Giles C of E Church on Walsall Street in Willenhall, has been rated requires improvement by Ofsted.

The watchdog criticised the club for not giving enough support to its children and for not passing on clear information to parents about their children.

Ofsted rated the club's leadership, quality of teaching, personal development and outcomes as requires improvement.

A report prepared after inspectors visited the club last month states: "The provider has not ensured all staff have supervision meetings. Staff have not developed their skills well enough to enable them to meet children's needs in a consistently good manner."

## Weaknesses

"Self-evaluation is not rigorous enough, and does not take account of key weaknesses that affect the learning and care of children."

In order to improve the club has been told to obtain information from other providers where its children attend as well as providing 'all parents with information about their child's key person and their role to support children in the club' and ensuring all parents receive daily information about children's experiences in the club.

However the report added: "Children have fun and are happy in the club. Children learn about other communities through planned activities. They learn first hand about cultures as they mix with others from a wide range of backgrounds."

"Children are well behaved and learn to treat others with respect."

Yvonne Greenaway, who runs the club, said: "I feel the report was a little bit harsh. The report says we do not obtain sufficient information from other providers but we are in regular discussion with St Giles C of E Primary School."

## Brush with law ends in jail



**Paul White, left, before being sent to prison and right, during the robbery with his face mostly covered by a mask at hood on CCTV**

AN armed robber has been jailed after his attempts to storm a fast food restaurant led to a brush with the law.

CCTV images of Paul White, aged 34, from Flaxhall Street, Walsall, were captured by security cameras as he tried to hold up McDonalds on Bescot Drive, Walsall, on the evening of December 20.

Along with two other armed men, he threatened terrified staff and customers with a handgun as the store manager was frogmarched to an office to demand the store's takings. Afterwards, CCTV footage was

circulated amongst West Midlands Police officers, one who saw the footage recognised the criminal's face, prompting his arrest on December 29.

Before the matter was taken to court, White denied any involvement in the robbery, however he made a crucial error on the evening itself. He left a rucksack behind, which was found with a used toothbrush inside, covered in his DNA, leaving him with no choice but to plead guilty. He was jailed for seven years and two months at Wolverhampton Crown Court on April 10.



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# Fundraising move to help Kyle's family

A FUNDRAISING appeal to help the family of a man who was killed in a car crash with funeral costs has been started by one of his friends.

Kyle Bullock, aged 21, died after a crash between an MG Rover which he was the passenger in and a van at the junction of Fryers Road and Leamore Lane in Bloxwich. The smash happened on April 9 and Mr Bullock was confirmed dead at the scene.

Since then tributes have poured in at the scene of the crash, with numerous flowers, cards and balloons

left. Now a page has been set up on online fundraising site Go Fund Me by Amie Keogh, a friend of Mr Bullock's, in order to give him 'the send off he deserves'. In just over a week, more than £1,000 has been raised by 57 donors, pushing the campaign towards its £5,000 goal.

Writing on the webpage, Amie said: "I am trying to raise money for my best friends funeral and take some ease off his family in this hard time. Please keep sharing and donating for Kyle as it will help his family give him

the best send off he deserves." A statement released by West Midlands Police on behalf of his family said: "Kyle was a loving brother, nephew and a father who we will all miss so much.

"He is now back with his mom who he never got over losing."

A 28-year-old man who was driving the car was arrested on suspicion of causing death by dangerous driving. He has been released on bail pending further enquiries. Another passenger, a man aged 20, remains in a critical condition with multiple injuries.

## May's battle cry for the Black Country



On the campaign trail – Theresa May gives a speech at Netherton Conservative Club during a visit to the region

THERESA May says the Black Country is a 'very important battleground' ahead of the 'most important election' of her lifetime. Her comments come as the Conservatives look to snatch seats away from Jeremy Corbyn's Labour in Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton at June's General Election.

The Tories have earmarked Walsall North, Dudley North and Wolverhampton South West as key targets.

Speaking at Netherton Conservative Club on Saturday, Mrs May said: "The Black Country is very important and is going to be a very important bat-

tleground for the next election. Every vote that is cast here is going to be important for the future of our country. It will be a vote for a stronger Britain in the future."

Dudley South MP Mike Wood said: "This visit shows that she is determined to win not only in Dudley South but also others seats in the area."

"Dudley North, Walsall North, Wolverhampton South West – these are all seats Conservatives will be fighting extremely hard for."

Earlier the Prime Minister had been out campaigning around Alderdale

Avenue in Sedgley. The street is in Dudley North, which Labour MP Ian Austin fought hard to defend at the last election. In 2010 he had a majority of just 1.1 per cent.

Alderdale Avenue is also on the border of Wolverhampton South West, which has swung between the main parties in the past two elections.

Labour had just a two per cent majority at the last general election and the Conservatives are hopeful of overturning that, especially after current MP Rob Marris announced last week he would not be seeking re-election.

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Direct Specs have enabled thousands of local people to make huge savings on all types of frames and lenses. They sell the same quality frames as any other High Street optician but at a fraction of the price. And with over 500 styles to choose from, they offer fantastic choice as well as great value for money.

Direct Specs was set up in 1997 and permanently changed the optical market by manufacturing glasses and selling direct to the public, cutting out the middle man and passing on huge savings to customers.

## Relocated

Since their first store opening, the firm has grown considerably, with a cutting-edge manufacturing plant near Birmingham, outlets across the Midlands and a busy on-line store.

They recently relocated from the Broadway to larger, more modern premises on Bridgeman Street, where they now have even more frames on display. But Direct Specs aren't just about low prices; customer satisfaction is given top priority which is why their customer base has continued to grow year after year.

While many retailers are still struggling with the impact of the recession and competition from the internet, Direct Specs have succeeded



Members of staff at the ready, inside the premises at Bridgeman Street in Walsall

by offering products at on-line prices but with the benefit of being able to try-on frames and get one-to-one advice and fitting.

While the choice of frames is obvious to anyone who sees it, the range of lenses is almost as diverse. Within the broad distance, reading, bifocal and varifocal types there

are a huge number of individual variations encompassing thinner lenses, the latest Transitions lenses and varifocals that are 100 per cent custom-made rather than being an 'off the peg' design. Add to these the various treatments such as anti-reflection coating, tinting and UV-filters and the choice is vast. To

ensure that customers choose the appropriate lens type, Direct Specs only employ optician-trained staff with significant experience.

If you're in the market for new glasses, grab your prescription and head for their store on Bridgeman Street (the road between the Saddler's Centre car park and Manor Hospital).



The exterior of the shop, which is in the 'factory outlet' concept

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## Roan's road to victory sees him win silver



Back home, with a silver medal, Roan McDermott, aged 11, of Oldbury, after competing in the Romanian championships

AN 11-year-old has returned home from competing in the WUKF European Championships in Romania for Team GB – bagging a silver medal. Roan McDermott, from Oldbury, has followed in his father's footsteps by taking up karate.

Father Clive McDermott also once competed in the England squad for karate when he was younger.

But now Roan, who studies at Moat Farm Junior School and trains at Dudley Shukokai at Thorns Community College in Brierley Hill, has competed across the country and Ireland but his trip to Romania from April 5 to 10 was his first competition further afield.

He won the medal in the Kumite fighting category. Mother Theresa McDermott said she was 'immensely proud' of Roan. She said: "Roan started training when he was six and has followed in his dad's footsteps because he used to do it when he was younger too – he was in the England squad. He's done competitions all over the country and one in Ireland at the end of last year but this was his first major tournament. There were around 2,000 people at the championships but he was up against 38 others.

"We're very proud of him. He did seven fights one after another without stopping so he's done amazingly well."

Roan is now looking for a sponsor – anyone interested in sponsoring him can contact 07983678848.

## Region is shamed over poor air quality

SANDWELL and Wolverhampton are among the top 10 worst pollution hotspots outside London, it has been revealed.

The West Midlands contains three of the UK's most polluted locations when it comes to exposing nursery children to illegal levels of nitrogen dioxide – thanks to its motorways and dual carriageways.

The Government's own figures show air pollution is responsible for almost 3,000 deaths a year in the West Midlands and, in 2015, Birmingham was one of five cities – alongside Leeds, Nottingham, Derby and Southampton – ordered to introduce a clean air zone by 2020. But campaigners say that despite the bleak picture there appears to be a lack of awareness among many of those living and working in some of the worst-hit areas.

Outside of London, the top 10 local authority areas most affected are: Birmingham, Sandwell, Nottingham, Plymouth, Manchester, Leicester, Hampshire, Leeds, Wolverhampton and Salford.

By Marion Brennan

In Birmingham there are 38 nurseries and 30 schools within 150 metres of a road where emissions of nitrogen dioxide are above the legal limit. James Burn, the Green party candidate for West Midlands mayor, said: "The West Midlands is facing an air pollution crisis.

"The shocking truth is that 3,000 people a year here die prematurely from breathing our dirty air.

He said the area had been the 'poor relation' in terms of investment in public transport for decades. "We need a huge investment from government to enable us to build a world-class public transport system."

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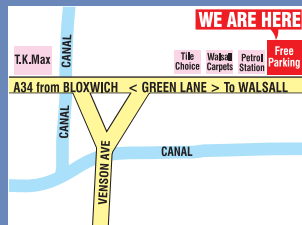
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"We're delighted to have been chosen to support this initiative alongside Mercedes-Benz, working in partnership with the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner and one of the country's leading police forces.

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"We look forward to producing a finished vehicle that will serve our police forces and the public well."

West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner David Jamieson was recently given a special tour of the site to meet workers and see the conversion process.

Mr Jamieson said: "Not only is this great value for money, because police forces and agencies from across the country have come together to drive down costs, but this contract is also good for the West Midlands economy as all of the vehicles will be converted in the region.

"I have made it a key priority of mine to ensure wherever possible that West Midlands Police's budget is used to support the regional economy, as well as keep people safe and



With staff, on the back row from left, commissioner David Jamieson, with MacNeillie boss Richard Semmens, and Stephen Bridge, MD of Mercedes-Benz Vans UK

reduce crime. It is encouraging to see so many employees from the Midlands that will be involved in this significant project that will ultimately also benefit the people of the region and across the country."

The majority of MacNeillie employees, and those deployed on the vehicle conversions will be from the Midlands region and will cover a variety of roles in the completion of the enterprise.

These will range from electrician, coach builder, and trim worker

through to livery applicators - who will put the hallmark crest and logo on each of the police force vans.

Mercedes-Benz Vans managing director Steve Bridge said: "We are delighted now to have had the opportunity to work with the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner, with our long-term partner MacNeillie, on the development of the state-of-the-art public-order van which is the subject of this new, national framework agreement."

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# 16 Talks focus on Bescot for sleepers

The Chronicle Thursday, April 27, 2017

NETWORK Rail and Sandwell Council are set to hold talks over a plan to build a factory on a disused railway site, creating 100 jobs.

The railway sidings at Bescot, next to the M6 between Sandwell and Walsall, has been chosen as the preferred location for a new concrete sleeper factory.

Network Rail has submitted a 'scoping opinion document' to the council. It says the move will also 'ensure Bescot remains a key location on the national railway map'.

The proposed site will be directly connected to the rail network making it quicker and easier to transport sleepers around Britain.

Martin Frobisher, of Network Rail, said: "We are in discussion with the local council to carry out an environmental assessment of the proposed factory and its impact on the surrounding area before we fully consult with local people and stakeholders on our plans."

# Cracking day of museum mirth



Wolly the entertainer gets set for the day ahead at the museum



Welcome – Kris Katchitt



Juggling Jim entertains



That's entertainment – Sarah Carrot of Moon Carrot puppet show

**HUNDREDS of children and their families visited Walsall Leather Museum for an Easter fun day.**

Held every Easter for almost 20 years, the fun day saw more than 300 youngsters take part in a variety of different activities.

The activities on offer included puppet and clown shows, with the likes of Wolly the Clown, Juggling Jim and Kris Katchitt entertaining the children.

**Popular**

Walk-about entertainers also went through the crowds and children took part in art and leather craft sessions.

Another event that proved to be popular

was face painting, with a long queue of children waiting in line for their chance.

Francesca Cox, assistant curator of the Leather Museum, said that this year's event was even more popular than last year's.

She said: "This year has certainly been busier than last year. It's our best day of the year, the one we look forward

to the most. It's been rammed. I'd say there's at least 300-400 people.

"It's been such a great day with so many kids running around. It's also our happiest day of the year. People spend all day here.

"The weather's helped. It's better for us when it's not sunny!"

The museum had more Easter events planned for later in the week.

The next event, due on Saturday, from 10am to 3pm, Darling Daisy - Introduction to Goldwork Embroidery Workshop for Adults with Ann Howden is fully booked.

For more information, visit [www.cms.walsall.gov.uk/leathermuseum/](http://www.cms.walsall.gov.uk/leathermuseum/) or call 01922 652286. The museum is located in a restored Victorian factory building in Littleton Street West.

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Ellie Simmonds seen with the medals she won in Rio at last year's paralympics

# Champ Ellie in the running for magazine gong

WALSALL'S swimming sensation Ellie Simmonds OBE is in line for a new gong which would put her alongside the likes of Serena Williams and Kelly Holmes.

Ellie, who was a former pupil at Aldridge School, has been nominated in Glamour magazine's women of the year competition.

The gold medal winner is up against the likes of Paralympic cyclist Dame Sarah Storey, heptathlete Jessica Ennis-Hill and Nicola Adams in the 'sportswoman' category, which was first won by Serena Williams in 2004. The event itself will be

hosted by Jennifer Saunders on June 6 in London. Ellie wrote on Twitter that she was 'honoured to be nominated with these amazing people' as she shared a link that allowed her fans to vote for her to clinch the gong.

This isn't the first time that Ellie's character and personality has led to her being recognised outside of her sporting field. In 2008, she was named BBC Young Sports Personality of The Year, after becoming Britain's youngest ever athlete when she competed in the Paralympics in Beijing. She won the 100m and 400m freestyle aged 13.

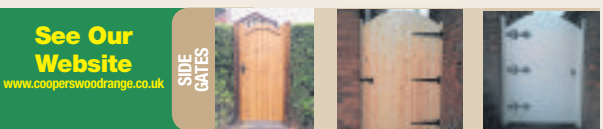
Last year at Rio, she defended her 200m individual medley, in a new world record, and clinched bronze in the 400m freestyle.

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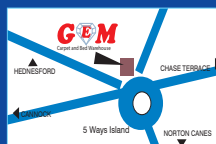


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Shell's Gemini G-AMGF, awaiting collection by Bader



Another Gemini as yet unpainted at the fuel pumps



Shell's Gemini G-AMGF, awaiting collection by Bader

# Aircraft had flying ace Bader at helm

IN the early 1950s there were two companies building aircraft at Wolverhampton Airport, Pendeford. And one of the aircraft they built was to be flown by the famous legless flying ace, Douglas Bader.

Boulton Paul Aircraft was producing its advanced trainer, the Balliol at the time, but the Airport was run by Wolverhampton Aviation, agents for Miles Aircraft at Woodley Airfield, near Reading.

When Miles went into liquidation Wolverhampton Aviation bought up a large stock of unfinished parts, and from them built six Gemini twin-engined light aircraft, but fitted Gipsy Major engines instead of the usual lower-powered Cirrus engines.

The third of these Geminis, registered G-AMGF, was sold to Shell Refining & Marketing in March 1951, and was to be flown by the legendary Sir Douglas Bader.

Bader had joined the RAF in 1928 but lost both his legs in a flying accident while performing aerobatics at Woodley.

## MEMORY LANE

By Alec Brew

He managed to rejoin the RAF after war broke out and became a fighter pilot, despite having tin legs. He led a squadron and then a wing of three squadrons during the Battle of Britain shooting down 22 German aircraft, with four shared victories.

In August 1941 he was shot down over Europe and captured. He made several escape attempts before being repatriated at the end of the war and retiring from the RAF as a Group Captain.

He went to work for Shell, and flew their Proctor light aircraft, until that was replaced by the Gemini, which was collected from Pendeford by the great man himself.

He became Managing Director of Shell Aviation and retired in 1969.

A film was made of his life story entitled Reach for the Sky, with Kenneth More playing the lead role. Bader died of a heart attack in 1982.



Douglas Bader on the wing of a Hurricane fighter

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# Former police chief facing case probe

A FORMER West Midlands and Staffordshire Chief Constable is facing possible investigation over the handling of an historical child sex abuse case.

The complaint against Chris Sims centres on why a meeting between him and alleged victims of abuse at Tettenhall College in Wolverhampton never took place – despite a request by then-Home Secretary Theresa May.

The Office of the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner David Jamieson said it had received a complaint from alleged victims Andrew Wood and Mark Shelton. It is understood another police force is to be asked to look into the complaint, but the pair have also been offered a meeting with current Chief Constable Dave Thompson and a representative of Mr Jamieson's office.

Mr Wood, originally of Wombourne, and Mr Shelton, of Shifnal, were expecting a meeting with Mr Sims in early 2015 to discuss problems with their case. It followed an intervention by Mrs May in February of that year after it was brought to her attention by then Conservative MP for Wolverhampton South West Paul Uppal.

At the time, prosecutors were deliberating whether to bring charges against ex-Tettenhall College head Colin Cope after video footage emerged showing him driving, carrying a table and climbing stairs eight months after being too sick to stand trial. He was charged with 11 offences on boys at the Wolverhampton school. He denied any wrongdoing.

Mr Wood and Mr Shelton were among five ex-pupils paid a total of £129,000 in an out-of-court settlement in 2012 by the boarding school. The school did not admit liability. Cope died aged 84 in March 2015.

A West Midlands Police spokesman said: "We are aware of the complaint and are seeking to arrange a meeting to discuss the topics raised."

Mr Sims declined to comment.

## Egg-stremely enjoyable



The Easter Bunny with hamper winner, shopper Natalie Jones

SADDLERS Shopping Centre in the heart of Walsall had an Eggcellent day of free family fun to mark the Easter holidays.

The centre had an egg-stra special guest on Easter Saturday, in the form of the Easter Bunny himself, who distributed free Easter Eggs to Saddlers customers who spent money in the centre.

Children also had their face painted for free by one of the bunny's little helpers.

On the Day, the Easter Bunny handed a giant Easter Hamper to lucky shopper Natalie Jones who told us that she has been coming to the centre for several years and is delighted to have won such a fabulous prize.

Centre Manager Melvin Glasby said: "It is great to be able to continue to put these free family events on for our visitors, giving them another cracking reason to hop down to Saddlers Shopping Centre."

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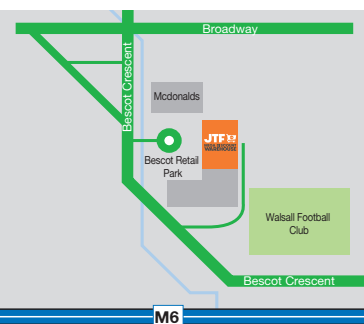


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# Mystery of lost war film

Report by Toby Neal

**TWISTING** and turning in the skies, these biplanes were the stars of a movie created by some of the greatest talents of the golden age of cinema, bringing home the drama and heroism of an epic and largely forgotten aerial battle.

Based at a Shropshire airfield, the film crew overcame technical challenges and unexpected dangers – such as being fired at by friendly anti-aircraft artillery – to shoot spectacular aerial footage.

And almost 75 years later, one of those movie stars has made a return to Shropshire, looking as good as new. It is the Gloster Gladiator serial number K8042 – one of a number of biplanes that were used in the making of the movie *Signed With Their Honour*. It is a recent arrival at the RAF Museum at Cosford.

The film was based on a book of that name by Australian war correspondent James Aldridge, which told the story of the air war in Greece in 1941, when a handful of outdated Gloster Gladiators fought the might of the Luftwaffe in a six-week delaying action until the single British squadron was wiped out.

## Operational

To take part in the movie, experienced RAF pilots were given a “rest holiday” after two or three years’ of continuous operational flying. Among them was a decorated Gladiator pilot who had been in the thick of the battle during the Greece campaign.

For taking to the skies above Shropshire to recreate the aerial conflict, they received no extra pay, the filming all being considered part of their rest cure.

What a fitting backdrop that footage would make for the Gladiator now on display at Cosford, having been moved there from the RAF Museum in London.

Alas, there is a great, unsolved mystery. For



“A mob of drinkers and real fellows” – that’s how Bordie captioned this picture at RAF Rednal



“Director Vernon Sewell tells us what to do – we just smile,” – Bordie, seen in the Tiger Moth’s rear seat



Movie star – the Gladiator on display at Cosford appeared in a 1943 movie filmed in Shropshire



Squadron Leader Richard Acworth, DFC, had previously flown Gladiators

after the aerial scenes were in the can, filming was cancelled indefinitely. The movie was never finished and nobody knows what happened to the footage that was shot by the team which had arrived at RAF Rednal, a Spitfire training base near Oswestry, in the autumn of 1943.

Maybe it lies undiscovered in some archive or private collection? Or maybe, and perhaps most probably, it was binned, and has been lost forever?

We can however bring you some rare images taken during the filming, which are in an

album which was compiled by the cameraman on the project, the late Osmond Borradaile.

“Bordie” was a renowned cinematographer who worked on films such as *The Four Feathers* and *Scott of the Antarctic*, and enhanced the work of the likes of Cecil B. De Mille, Alfred Hitchcock, and Otto Preminger. He has been described as “the greatest exterior camera artist in the world.”

A Canadian, his son George lives in Surrey, British Columbia, Canada, and has kindly emailed us his father’s photographic souvenirs of that Shropshire shoot. It is conceivable that

they include a photo of K8042, the Gladiator now at Cosford, although with the serial number not visible in some shots, it is impossible to be sure.

Bordie also wrote memoirs – they were compiled into the book “*Life Through A Lens*” by his daughter Anita Hadley.

An ambitious project, to his deep disappointment it ultimately fell victim to the limited resources of the day, he wrote, and he did not know what had happened to the negatives.

Neither George nor Anita, who lives in British Columbia, can shed any more light on what

happened to the completed footage. The Air Ministry had given Denham Studios the green light to make the film and co-operated by providing facilities, including aircraft and pilots. Locations around Shrewsbury were selected, with studio models built at Denham.

The producer was Paul Soskin, the director was Vernon Sewell, and the cast of “resting” RAF pilots included Squadron Leader Richard Acworth, who had won the Distinguished Flying Cross and had taken part in the original air battle over Greece, and another DFC winner, Birmingham-born Flying Officer Tommy Tinney, who had 52 pieces of shrapnel in his legs.

Bordie wrote in his memoirs: “A closely-knit group, the pilots became known as ‘Soskin’s Squadron’ after the producer, Paul Soskin.”

He went on: “Our pilots were a grand bunch of fellows. They had all flown at least two tours, and were assigned to us as a rest holiday. Some holiday all right!”

The exuberant pilots entered into the spirit of the production, and local townspeople must have wondered, said Bordie, about so many crash dives which left no trace of wreckage. The filming made headlines, and a story in the *Daily Express* of February 14, 1944, told how “in a market town in the wilds of north west England... country folk run from their cottages day after day to gaze up at the strangest series of aerial dogfights ever seen over Britain...”

The town concerned was not mentioned because of censorship, but may well have been Oswestry.

A captured Messerschmitt was used as the “enemy.”

Bordie wrote: “It did not take long for me to come to the conclusion that this was a most difficult assignment because of all the restrictions imposed on us. We would all be briefed as to the shots we wished to obtain, and warned of the balloon barrage to our east, and told that the ack-ack guns would open up on us if we approached the land from the sea. Well, by the time we got through the clouds and tried to form up to get a shot, we often were over these restricted areas. It was not nice to be fired on by our own guns.”

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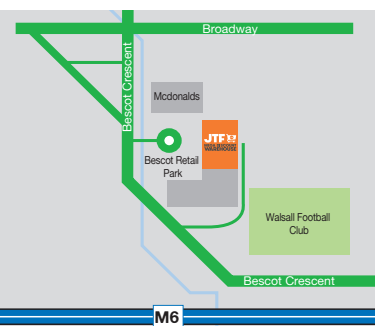
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Cerys Nelves from Wotton, who has starred in Trolled



Comedian Masai Graham from West Bromwich

## Club rocks with laughter as star comics perform

**THERE** were laughs-a-plenty at a new Black Country entertainment venue as a touring comedy club left crowds in hysterics.

Can Comedy Club hosted its latest gig at the former landmark Wednesbury Conservative Club – now known as Churchill's Bar and Restaurant.

BBC Mock The Week panellist Nathan Caton was joined by fellow comics Andy Robinson, Masai Graham and star of Sky One's Trolled, Cerys Nelves, who took turns in performing on stage.

Organisers from Can Comedy said they were 'overwhelmed' by how well the show went.

Andrew Nightingale, aged 34 from Wednesbury, who runs the company with his brother Paul, 29, said: "The gig was really good. We expected 40 to 50 people to turn up but the room was filled." The night was rounded off by Nathan who left the audience in 'stitches' after landing a well-delivered joke, said Andrew.

"We started off around 8.30pm and finished off just after 11," he said. "Nathan did a half hour performance at the end to close the gig. The audience was in stitches. I think he was hoping he could land his punch line, and once he delivered it the audience loved it." It comes as the venue was transformed following the closure of Wednesbury Conservative and Unionist Club in January last year after more than 140 years.

### Enjoyed

Paul, who is a father-of-two and is a computer science teacher at South Wolverhampton and Bilston Academy, has been running Can Comedy Club for the last five years with his brother.

Although they both have taken to the stage as stand-up comedians themselves, they have enjoyed the management side of running the club.

The show at the Walsall Street venue on Saturday, April 15, was the latest event run by Can Comedy in Wednesbury.

On April 1, they held a gig at The Lamp Restaurant, which was headlined by Joe Lycett.

The next show taking place at Churchill's will be on June 10. Tickets can be bought for £10.45 by visiting [www.wegotickets.com](http://www.wegotickets.com) and searching for 'Can Comedy @ Churchill's'.

Andrew said it was great to be able to bring high-profile comic acts to Wednesbury, saving people having to travel to venues in the likes of Wolverhampton and Birmingham.

Masai came to prominence after winning last year's Funniest Joke of the Edinburgh Fringe Award. The comedian, who calls himself "General Punochet", was previously named the UK's "Pun Champion" after winning a tournament hosted by Lee Nelson at the Leicester Comedy Festival. The winning joke was: "My dad has suggested that I register for a donor card. He's a man after my own heart."



Paul Coates from Yew Tree estate has fun during the show



Television regular, Nathan Caton, from London, seen in performance



Nathan Caton, Masai Graham, and brothers Paul and Andy Nightingale



Inside Churchill's, the venue once known as Wednesbury Conservative Club



# Let's hang on to the vintage Valli

## REVIEW

Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, Genting Arena, Birmingham

**THERE** is a scene towards the end of Jersey Boys – the musical about Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons – where the lead character says: “Like that bunny with the batteries I just keep going and going and going.”

And so it comes to pass as the real Frankie Valli is still performing in his 83rd year.

He doesn't bound about on stage like the Duracell rabbit, at his age you wouldn't expect him to. But, Oh what a night!

Valli cannot hit the high notes like he used to, but he was given an early chance to show off the falsetto with which he made his name as Dawn came four songs in.

### Video

Of course, Jersey Boys brings to light songs that are not readily associated with Valli, like Stay, Bye Bye Baby, Can't Take My Eyes Off You and Silence Is Golden and all featured here, the latter with help from two of his Four Seasons' backing singers.

There were times, however, when it appeared he had too much helium intake.

After promising Birmingham he would have even more fun than the last time he was there, the concert began with a historical video montage and ended with pretty much everyone on their feet. There were young and old in the audience, too, indicative of the impact his music has had over the years.



Even in his 83rd year Frankie Valli just loves to perform

And we had a great view of proceedings looking straight ahead towards the stage.

My Eyes Adored You had the glow sticks out early on in front of us. There was also a Frank Sinatra tribute with Under My Skin and a medley of 60s material with Spanish Harlem, My Girl and Groovin'.

Beggin' and Grease were among the big hits that followed before the aforementioned Can't Take My Eyes Off

You had everyone up and the finish came with the four big number ones, namely Sherry, Walk Like A Man. Big Girls Don't Cry and Rag Doll with Let's Hang On to finish.

Valli may be going strong at the age of 82, but you know he won't last forever.

In the meantime, let's hang on to the pleasure he has given his millions of adoring fans in the last six decades.

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# Good things come in small packages

**H**e describes himself as an old man who wants to complain about the world but offer no solutions. Jon Richardson is the archetypal Grumpy Old Man – who is both grumpy and old before his time.

And the quietly sophisticated comedian will thrill fans when he headlines Birmingham's Hippodrome on Thursday as part of a national tour.

The show follows on from his recent TV hit, *How to Survive the End of the World*, for Channel 4, which was screened earlier this year.

He says: "The show was basically a small terrified man and his (would you believe it) even smaller and sometimes more terrified wife making a list of the things that they're scared might kill them, and then me going out and looking into them one by one, in the hope that I can come home and tell her, 'D'you know what, actually these are all irrational fears. We don't need to worry about any of them, and we can get on with our lives as normal'.

Jon was supposed to investigate major dangers, such as terrorism, but digressed into looking at the state of sausages and air pollution.

"I think I'm quite small, I don't think that helps. I feel quite small in a lot of ways. And I also think I'm right – we're all going to die of something, and there's just a lot of awful stuff in the world. I know that's not a particularly upbeat message, particularly coming from a comedian, but that's all that life is, really: Dealing with horrific stuff and trying to make it funny," he says.

## DEMEANOUR

"I think it's more that it impacts on my demeanour. We've had a couple of incidents where we haven't done things as a family: 'We'll avoid built-up areas, so there's times when we actually have changed events. But it's more that sort of constant fear of things just stops you being the person you'd like to be. I don't know if this has come across in our dealings so far, but I wouldn't say I'm a particularly sparkling, upbeat person to talk to. I need all the help I can get, so if I could at least not have that voice in the back of my head that's always telling me to look left and look right and look up, and breathe through my nose and not through my mouth, so it's double-filtered, and all those silly things, maybe I'd be a better person if I could live more in the moment."

Jon's wife is also a worrier and they often end up freaking one another out, rather than winding each other up. There are times when it might be easier for both of them to simply go and see a psychiatrist.

"It would, but that would be a selfish route to my goal! It would sort me out, but I am in the role of giving to the wider community, and that's why I'm willing to film my investigations and put them on telly. You will see a genuine upsurge in the wellbeing of Britain. I would say, in the 2-3 weeks after this, there will be an immediate spike. And then in the six to 12 months afterwards we'll start to see the economic benefit of my work."

Jon found a number of weird scenarios in his new TV show. The strangest was meeting a man called Troy in Canada.

"What you often find with these documentaries is that everyone you meet could easily have a documentary all to themselves. People's lives are fascinating, and this documentary was certainly like that. Every issue we looked into, you could have spent not just one documentary, but a series looking into it. As for Troy – there should be some Kardashians or Osbornes-style documentary. For a start there should be a webcam on him all the time, just so that we

Young fogey – Jon's old and grumpy before his time



*I wouldn't say I'm a particularly sparkling, upbeat person to talk to*

can tune in and watch him for a bit. He gave us so much footage. He's not just invented an anti-bear suit.

"He's invented what he thinks is an improved Kevlar. It's a lighter-weight, more flexible, bullet and bomb-proof outfit for the army, which he's just made himself in his garage. He's created a chemical which he says if you drop it in an ocean, it'll separate the oil from the water, so that you can clear up the oil from an oil spill in minutes rather than weeks.

"He's invented his own laser, which he points at his own head daily, to regenerate hair growth. He's one of the most intriguing people I've met in my life. We filmed with him in the bear suit, testing it by driving through a brick wall. The hours in his laboratory were so intense. We could have just aired that undedited. And there's a genuine possibility that he's invented something that could change the world, and no-one's listening to him. Because he sounds so intense, you end up just shuffling out of the room, because he's just terrifying to be with. But undoubtedly he was the most intriguing, and if I was more of a Louis Theroux type, I'd definitely go back and do a full week with him."

● For more entertainment news and reviews see **The Ticket** in your Express & Star every Friday.



Sheridan Smith in Funny Girl



# Funny Girl Sheridan is ready for her star turn

THE West End's brightest star, Sheridan Smith, is coming to Birmingham Hippodrome to reprise her role as Fanny Brice following record-breaking success in hit musical Funny Girl in London.

Funny Girl brought global fame to Barbra Streisand 50 years ago, on Broadway, in the West End and then as a movie musical, and boasts such iconic songs as People and Don't Rain On My Parade.

It tells the story of Fanny Brice who went from burlesque to Broadway, becoming one of America's biggest stage and radio stars of the 1920s and 30s.

Michael Mayer's revamp of the 1964 show features revisions by Harvey Fierstein of Isobel Lennart's original book, and of course retains the songs by Julie Styne and Bob Merrill.

Sheridan Smith won an Olivier Award for her starring role in Legally Blonde at the Savoy Theatre, and an Olivier for her dramatic role in Flare Path at the Theatre Royal Haymarket. In television she won a Bafta for her role in Mrs Biggs and praise for playing Cilla, after originally catching the eye in Gavin & Stacey and Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps.

Funny Girl is at Birmingham Hippodrome from Monday to Saturday, May 8-13. For tickets visit [www.birminghamhippodrome.com](http://www.birminghamhippodrome.com) or call 0844 338 5000.

Funny Girl will visit Wolverhampton Grand Theatre from July 24 to 29 with Natasha J Barnes as Brice. She got excellent reviews when sharing the role with Smith in the West End. The male lead role of Nick Arnstein will be played by Chris Peluso in Birmingham and by Darius Campbell in Wolverhampton. Campbell is now a major stage star after pop hits as Darius.

# Rich pickings with American grouch



Rich Hall is rightly regarded as one of the funniest comedians to come out of the US in recent times.

And, as he is based in the UK most of the time, this country has, over the past three decades, had the benefit from his grouchy sense of humour.

Now we are about to enjoy more of his crotchety comedy, as he is on a nationwide tour with his new show Hoedown, coming to Stourbridge Town Hall on May 19 and Stafford Gatehouse on May 26.

The comedian, who has won both a Perrier (Edinburgh Comedy Festival) and a Barry (Melbourne International Comedy Festival) Award, is surely the funniest

curmudgeon in The West (with apologies to Jack Dee and Romesh Ranganathan).

Rich's straight-talking and acerbic comedy leaves his targets reeling and his audiences in stitches. He sends up whichever country he is in, but perhaps reserves his most trenchant scorn for his native USA, and since the arrival of President Trump, he's got plenty to take aim at.

Rich, who has presented such BBC 4 documentaries as Rich Hall's Inventing the Indian and Rich Hall's Presidential Grudge Match, says he is excited to be performing live once again.

"I love the fact that when a live show is over, it's gone. It's happened, and it will never

happen like that again. It can't be replicated. That's a great magical moment," he says

"In every single show, there are always two or three moments where I'm thinking, 'Wow, where did that come from?' You're constantly thinking on your feet."

One of the features of Rich's act is that he goes out of his way to find out about the town he is playing in and then improvise a song about it. "I try to tap into what is happening locally and address that musically."

"I like to do something custom-made every night. Once they realise you're not just trotting out your regular act, people think, 'He's made a real effort. He's on our side, so we're on his side'. Then you can take them anywhere."

# Quality of Mersey sound at Sunflower

Psychedelic pop with a Scouse flavour will be heard in Birmingham city centre when The Sundowners and Edgar Jones & The New Joneses join forces at the Sunflower Lounge on Thursday, May 4. Both bands have new albums out on Liverpool label Skeleton Key Records.

As a teenager Jones was in a band with Merseyside legend Ian McCulloch of Echo & The Bunnymen - who has his own gig at Bilston's Robin 2 on May 9 - before forming cult outfit The Stairs, and working with Paul Weller and Johnny Marr.

The summery sounding Sundowners feature the vocals of Niamh Rowe and Fiona Skelly. Fiona and Affie Skelly, on lead guitar, are siblings to The Coral's Skelly brothers. Birmingham band Cut Glass Kings will support at the Smallbrook Queensway venue.

# Magical circus tale hits The Road

One of the masterpieces of cinema, Federico Fellini's 1957 Oscar-winner, La Strada (The Road), is brought to the stage in a new adaptation at Birmingham Repertory Theatre from May 8 to 13 as part of a UK tour.

La Strada tells the tender tale of wide-eyed Gelsomina (Audrey Brisson, pictured) who is sold to the brutish circus strongman Zampano but Il Matto, the tightrope walker, tries to rekindle her broken spirit. Visit [birmingham-rep.co.uk](http://birmingham-rep.co.uk) or call the box office on 0121 236 4455.



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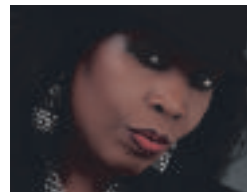
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20/5	5	Great Yarmouth	9/7	6	Durham and Northumbria
22/5	5	Cornwall (Looe)(more dates)	14/7	5	Falmouth
22/5	6	Highland Railways	19/7	5	Llandudno (more dates)
29/5	5	Ilfracombe	23/7	7	Scotland Fort William
29/5	5	Snowdonia and Trains	31/7	5	North Devon Bideford
5/6	4	Tenby (more dates)	3/9	5	Isle of Scilly
5/6	5	Bournemouth (more dates)	11/8	3	Liverpool and Merseyside
5/6	5	Warners Thornsbys Hall	26/8	6	Ireland The Giants Causeway
12/6	5	Isle of Wight (more dates)	3/9	5	Suffolk Village
16/6	4	Paignton/Torquay (more dates)	29/9	5	Isle of Man
22/6	5	Sidmouth (more dates)	10/10	8	Channel Islands
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CHOICE



Keeley Hawes

**Line of Duty (BBC1, 9pm)**  
It's the time when the likes of Call the Midwife, Heartbeat, Where the Heart Is and other such rose-tinted shows have been broadcast, and The Durrells now falls firmly into that bracket. Simon Nye of Men Behaving Badly fame, is behind this hit revival on ITV. "I've written TV series that were greeted by bafflement, critical vitriol or – worst of all – nothing more than the rustle of tumbleweed," he reveals. "Thank you therefore to everyone, on both sides of the Atlantic, who responded so warmly to the first series of The Durrells last year" This week, Larry is overjoyed at the prospect of his first novel being published back home in England; it's a shame that nobody else seems as thrilled.

BBC1

**6.00** Breakfast. **7.50** Match of the Day, (R) **9.00** The Andrew Marr Show. **10.00** The Big Questions. **11.00** Regional Programme. **12.15** Bargain Hunt. (R) **1.00** BBC News: Weather. **1.15** Homes Under the Hammer. (R) **2.15** Wanted Down Under. **3.15** Flog It! (R) **4.05** Points of View. **4.20** Escape to the Country. (R) **5.05** Songs of Praise. **5.40** Pointless Celebrities. (R)  
**6.30 BBC News.**  
**6.50 Regional Programme.**  
**7.00 Countryfile.** Ellie Harrison visits Warwickshire for Hedgehog Awareness Week, and meets three girls who have set up a rehab centre for the animals. Steve Brown meets local volunteers trying to preserve wildlife along the river Tame and its floodplain, and John Craven visits a nature reserve that doubles as a burial ground. Adam Henson meets a farming family in Cumbria and Tom Heap explores Scotland's salmon industry.  
**8.00 Antiques Roadshow.** The roving team values more decorative objects and rarities belonging to the public.  
**9.00 Line of Duty.** Nick faces lengthy questioning before being charged with Tim Field's murder. The AC-12 team is convinced Roz was also involved, but with Haslings coming under pressure from Hilton, the detectives are running out of time to prove their theory, and are forced to risk everything to bring the guilty parties to justice. Last in the series.  
**10.00 BBC News.**  
**10.20 Regional Programme.**  
**10.30 Match of the Day 2.** Mark Chapman reviews the day's Premier League action, which featured Tottenham Hotspur v Arsenal, Everton v Chelsea, Manchester United v Swansea City and Middlesbrough v Manchester City. Spurs finally seem destined to finish above their north London rivals, and victory would be even sweeter as it would harm the Gunners' chances of a top-four finish.  
**11.50 The Women's Football Show.** Eilidh Barbour presents action from the latest FA WSL. Spring Series fixtures, including Sunderland v Arsenal.  
**12.25** Weather for the Week Ahead. **12.30** BBC News.

BBC2

**6.30** A to Z of TV Gardening. (R) **7.15** Around the World in 80 Gardens. (R) **8.15** The Beechgrove Garden. (R) **8.50** Countryfile. (R) **9.45** Saturday Kitchen Best Bites. **11.15** Nigel Slater: Eating Together. (R) **11.45** Simply Nigella. (R) **12.15** MOTD2 Extra. **1.00** Athletics: World Relay Championship Highlights. **2.00** Live Snooker: The World Championship. Hazel Irvine presents coverage of the opening session of the final at the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield, where the first eight frames of the match are scheduled to take place.  
**6.00 Amazing Hotels: Life Beyond the Lobby.** Giles Coren and Monica Galetti join the staff working in some of the most unusual hotels around the world, learning the tricks of the trade. (R)  
**7.00 Live Snooker: The World Championship.** Hazel Irvine presents all the action from the second session of the final at Sheffield's Crucible Theatre, where a further nine frames are scheduled to take place. The second session of last year's final saw Ding Junhui stage a fightback to trail Mark Selby by just one frame at 7-8, before the Jester from Leicester recovered to end the day with a 10-7 lead. The commentary team features five former world champions in Dennis Taylor, Steve Davis, John Parrott, Ken Doherty and Stephen Hendry, along with Willie Thorne and John Virgo.  
**11.00 Film: Drive.** (2011) A stuntman who moonlights as a getaway driver tries to protect the wife and child of an imprisoned criminal. When the convict is released, the driver tries to convince him to give up his life of crime for his family's sake, but when they work together on a robbery, they end up drawn into a conflict with the Mafia. Crime drama, with Ryan Gosling, Carey Mulligan and Bryan Cranston.  
**12.35** Sign Zone: Question Time. David Dimbleby chairs the debate from Oxford, with a panel of politicians and other guests facing topical questions from the audience. (R) **1.35** Holby City. After uncovering a revelation from Matteo's past, he and Jac clash over a patient. Meanwhile, Sacha is not himself, but how long will he be able to keep Essie off the scent? Elsewhere, Ric cracks the whip on the Acute Assessment Unit floor, but a surprise visitor soon throws him off his game. (R) **2.30** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

**6.00** CITV: Bottom Knockout Street. **6.10** Bottom Knockout Street. (R) **6.25** Sooty. (R) **6.35** Signed Street: Share a Story. (R) **6.40** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.50** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **7.00** Outbuds. (R) **7.05** Marvel Avengers Assemble. (R) **7.30** Thunderbirds Are Go. (R) **7.55** NinjaGo: Masters of Spinjitzu. (R) **8.25** ITV News. **8.30** Weekend. **9.25** Countrywise: Guide to Britain. (R) **10.00** Peston on Sunday. **11.00** Judge Rinder. (R) **12.00** ITV News: Weather. **12.05** Fishing Impossible. (R) **12.35** Who's Doing the Dishes? (R) **1.35** Tipping Point. (R) **2.40** Britain's Got Talent. (R) **4.00** Film: On Her Majesty's Secret Service. (1969) James Bond adventure, starring George Lazenby.  
**6.35 Regional Programme:** Weather. **6.45** ITV News: Weather.  
**7.00 Bigheds.** Jason Manford hosts the comedy game show in which members of the public compete in a series of bizarre physical challenges while wearing giant model heads of David Beckham, Ed Sheeran, Taylor Swift, Prince Charles and Queen Victoria. They must dodge past giant bouncers to get into a nightclub, fight over microphones to record a single, and get away before the paparazzi see them. With commentary from Jenny Powell and Kriss Akabusi.  
**8.00 The Durrells.** Larry's latest novel is being published – but nobody seems to be impressed. Leslie has an idea for a new business venture involving making liquor out of kumquats.  
**9.00 Grantchester.** The villagers play a cricket match against nearby Whitteford, but after an incident involving contaminated beer, one batsman is found poisoned. Guest starring Peter Davison.  
**10.00** ITV News: Weather.  
**10.20 Lethal Weapon.** The festive holiday season weighs heavily on Riggs, who flashes back to past Christmases with his late wife Miranda. Clayne Crawford stars. (R)  
**11.20 Premiership Rugby Union.** Highlights of the latest top-flight fixtures, which included Harlequins v Wasps, Bath v Gloucester and Exeter Chiefs v Northampton Saints.  
**12.15** Peston on Sunday. (R) **1.10** Jackpot247. **3.00** Motorsport UK. **3.50** The Cube. (R) **4.40** ITV Nightscreen. **5.05** The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R)

CHANNEL 4

**6.10** The King of Queens. (R) **6.35** The King of Queens. (R) **7.00** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.25** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.55** Frasier. (R) **8.25** Frasier. (R) **9.00** Sunday Brunch. **12.00** Formula 1 Russian Grand Prix Live Build-Up. Previewing the fourth round of the season. **12.35** Formula 1 Russian Grand Prix Live. Coverage of the fourth round of the season (Start-time 1.00pm). **3.10** Formula 1 Russian Grand Prix Live Reaction. A review of the fourth round of the season. **4.30** Motorsport's Most Expensive Cars. **5.35** Channel 4 News.  
**6.05 George Clarke's Old House, New Home.** George visits a Grade-II listed worker's cottage in Hampshire, as his mission to future-proof historic houses continues. Due to restrictions on planning permissions, the property has become somewhat disorganised, and is in need of a careful makeover. Seeking inspiration, George tours a Victorian stable that was renovated to add a gym, cinema and roof garden. (R)  
**7.00 Escape to Costa Rica.** New series. Science writer Gaia Vince explores the island, which is the most sustainable nation in the world, home to over 500,000 species of animal and with a national grid run on rivers and volcanoes that is due to be completely carbon neutral by 2021. She meets the republic's president, who explains his environmental policies, and joins a team of scientists helping to preserve the island's forests and wildlife.  
**8.00 Film: Transformers: Dark of the Moon.** (2011) The heroic autobots discover that a spaceship from their own planet crashed into the moon decades ago, carrying their former leader and an incredibly powerful device. They must fight to defend the human race as their enemies the decepticons plot to use this machine to rebuild their own world and destroy the Earth. Sci-fi adventure sequel, with Shia LaBeouf, Josh Duhamel and Rosie Huntington-Whiteley.  
**11.00 Gogglebox.** Capturing the households' instant reactions to what they are watching on TV from the comfort of their own sofas. (R)  
**12.05** Film: Mud. (2012) **2.25** KOTV Boxing Weekly. **2.50** Giffette World Sport. **3.15** Shipping Wars UK. (R) **3.40** Building the Dream. **4.35** Location, Location, Location. (R) **5.30** Four in a Bed. (R)

CHANNEL 5

**6.00** Milkshake!: Peppa Pig. **6.05** Peppa Pig. (R) **6.10** Milkshake! Monkey. (R) **6.15** Paw Patrol. (R) **6.30** Bob the Builder. (R) **6.40** Fireman Sam. (R) **6.50** Oily the Little White Van. **7.00** Oily the Little White Van. **7.10** Paw Patrol. (R) **7.25** Blaze and the Monster Machines. **7.50** Noddy: Toyland Detective. (R) **8.10** Wissper. (R) **8.20** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. (R) **8.55** Football on 5: The Championship. (R) **9.45** Football on 5: Goal Rush. (R) **10.00** Great Birmingham 10K. Live coverage of the race. **12.00** Film: Getting Even with Dad. (1994) Family comedy, starring Macaulay Culkin and Ted Danson. **2.00** Film: Three Men and a Little Lady. **2.00** Film: Comedy sequel, starring Tom Selleck. **4.00** Film: Housesetter. (1992) Romantic comedy, starring Steve Martin and Goldie Hawn.  
**6.00 Film: Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves.** (1991) An English nobleman returns home from the crusades to find his father has been murdered and the local people are oppressed by the tyrannical rule of the Sheriff of Nottingham. Branded an outlaw, he recruits a group of bandits to fight for justice and protect the downtrodden. Action adventure, starring Kevin Costner, Alan Rickman, Morgan Freeman and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio. Edited for daytime broadcast.  
**8.55** 5 News Weekend.  
**9.00 Greatest Ever 90s Movies.** Patsy Kensit presents a countdown of some of the most memorable films from the last decade of the 20th century, including Titanic and Transporting. (R)  
**11.50 Football on 5: Goal Rush.** Action from the final fixtures of the regular season in League One, including Southend United v Bury, Bristol Rovers v Millwall and Gillingham v Fleetwood Town.  
**12.35** Criminals: Caught on Camera. The use of CCTV to help police catch reckless and dangerous drivers. (R) **1.00** SuperCasino. Viewers get the chance to take part in live interactive gaming, with a mix of roulette-wheel spins and lively chat from the presenting team. **3.10** Film: Charade. (1963) A distraught widow is pursued by her husband's killers, who have linked her to a missing haul of money. Romantic thriller, starring Audrey Hepburn, Cary Grant and Walter Matthau. **5.00** House Doctor. (R) **5.25** Wildlife SOS. The work of a wildlife sanctuary. (R) **5.50** Roary the Racing Car. Hattie makes an emergency landing. (R)

DIGITAL

**BBC Four**  
**7.00** The Birth of British Music **8.00** The Secret Life of the Motorway **9.00** Horizon: Dancing in the Dark – The End of Physics? **10.00** Trump's First 100 Days **11.00** Being Evel Knievel: Storyville **12.30** The BBC at War **1.30** Metamorphosis – The Science of Change **2.30** Horizon: Dancing in the Dark – The End of Physics? **3.30** Close  
**ITV2**  
**11.25** Take Me Out **12.40** Catchphrase **1.20** You've Been Framed! Goes Wild! **2.25** Film: Mr Magorium's Wonder Emporium (2007) **4.15** Britain's Got Talent **5.40** Britain's Got More Talent **6.45** Film: Miss Congeniality 2: Armed and Fabulous (2005) **9.00** Take Me Out – The Gossip **10.00** Family Guy **11.30** American Dad! **12.25** The Cleveland Show **1.25** The Vampire Diaries **2.10** Fleur East: The Hot Desk **2.20** Teleshopping **5.50** ITV2 Nightscreen  
**ITV3**  
**11.40** Film: Forever Young (1992) **12.40** FYI Daily **12.45** Film: Forever Young (1992) **1.40** A Touch of Frost **3.50** Foyle's War **5.55** Midsomer Murders **8.00** Royal Stories **9.00** Prince Harry in Africa **10.00** Law & Order: UK **12.05** Wire in the Blood **2.00** Lewis **3.40** May the Best House Win **5.20** In Loving Memory **5.45** ITV3 Nightscreen  
**ITV4**  
**11.25** Cycling **12.00** Cycling: Tour de Yorkshire Live. The third and final stage. **5.30** Pawn Stars **5.55** The Chase **Celebrity Special** **7.00** Cycling: Tour de Yorkshire **8.00** Premiership Rugby Union **9.00** Car Wars **10.05** Film: Beetlejuice (1988) **12.00** River Monsters **2.05** Fifth Gear **2.55** ITV4 Nightscreen **3.00** Teleshopping  
**E4**  
**11.00** The Goldbergs **12.30** Black-ish **1.00** Baby Daddy **1.30** Kevin Can Wait **2.00** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **2.30** New Girl **3.00** Film: The Net (1995) **5.15** Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **5.30** The Big Bang Theory **9.00** Marvel's Agents of SHIELD **10.00** Tattoo Fixers **12.05** Ed's Tattoo Artist of the Year **1.05** Celebrity First Dates **2.10** Naked Attraction **3.05** Marvel's Agents of SHIELD **3.50** Hollyoaks  
**Film4**  
**11.00** Hercules (1983) **1.00** Song of the Sea (2014) **2.50** Dr Sauss' The Lorax (2012) **4.30** Short Circuit (1986) **6.35** Mrs Doubtfire (1993) **9.00** Now You See Me (2013) **11.15** The Taking of Pelham 123 (2009) **1.20** The Player (1992) **3.55** Close



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FILM CHOICES

**MONDAY**  
**Saving Mr Banks, BBC1, 8.30pm**  
Walt Disney becomes determined to adapt Mary Poppins into a film, but faces an obstacle in the shape of author PL Travers, who resists the idea of a sentimental Hollywood version of her book. Fact-based drama, with Emma Thompson, Tom Hanks, Paul Giamatti and Colin Farrell. (2013)

**TUESDAY**  
**A Walk Among the Tombstones, Channel 5, 9pm**  
An ex cop working as an unlicensed private eye is hired by a drug trafficker to find the men who murdered his wife. Crime thriller based on Lawrence Sanders' novel, starring Liam Neeson. (2014)

**WEDNESDAY**  
**The Bling Ring, Channel 4, 1.55am**  
Five teenagers united by an obsession with celebrity steal from the houses of the rich and famous stars they idolise, using the internet to follow their targets' movements. When the police finally catch up with them, the arrest brings a taste of the fame they have craved. Fact-based drama, starring Emma Watson and Israel Broussard. (2013)



Saving Mr Banks, Monday, BBC1, 8.30pm

**FRIDAY**  
**It's Complicated, Channel 5, 10pm**  
Divorced couple Jane and Jake are reunited at their son's college graduation after 10 years apart, and end up sleeping together. Despite Jake's marriage to a younger woman and Jane's fledgling romance with a kindly architect, the pair end up having a clandestine affair. Romantic comedy, starring Meryl Streep, Alec Baldwin, Steve Martin, John Krasinski, Lake Bell, Mary Kay Place, Rita Wilson and Alexandra Wentworth. (2009)

**American Gangster, ITV, 10.40pm**  
The story of 1970s drug kingpin Frank Lucas, whose innovative methods of smuggling heroin into the US made him one of the leading figures in the New York underworld. A detective is assigned to bring Lucas's empire down, but his investigation is undermined by police corruption. Ridley Scott's fact-based crime drama, starring Denzel Washington, Russell Crowe, Chiwetel Ejiofor and Josh Brolin. (2007)

Kayvan promises '100 per cent real news guaranteed'

As the Fonejacker and Facejacker, Kayvan Novak became known as the man of a thousand voices.

His masterful characters including call centre anti-hero Mr Internet Service Providings, cockney geezer Terry Tibbs and polite Ugandan scammer Augustus Kwembe showed off his remarkable ability to create a range of different characters.

However, Novak is also very versatile and his acting CV includes everything from Oscar-winning thriller Syriana, an acclaimed performance in the 2010 controversial cult comedy Four Lions and voicing Brains in the Thunderbirds Are Go re-boot.

You may have also seen him as a smooth-talking face of bookie's complaints department and in the 2015 BBC Four sitcom Asylum which was inspired by Julian Assange's two-year stay in the Ecuadorian embassy.

And the 38-year-old British Iranian is back on familiar territory with new satirical series Britain Today Tonight in which he plays a variety of roles at the fictional Channel 9Nine News Network.

The show has been made by Peep Show creators Objective Productions, with Channel 4 describing the format as "a spoof tabloid news show" that shines a light on contemporary Britain and promises "100 per cent real news guaranteed".

And make no mistake, with Novak playing the part of prize-winning American host Douglas 'Digger' Daley, the reporters and even some of the subjects of the reports – this is the 'news' as you have never seen it before.

Britain Today Tonight features brand-new specially created characters, and just like Fonejacker and Facejacker it will see the Baffa-winning comedian causing havoc on the streets of Britain.

Channel 4 explains: "He'll be disguising himself as a range of weird and wonderful personalities in order to perform a range of hidden

camera hits on celebrities and politicians, as well as winding up the public at large.

"With Kayvan at the centre of every 'news report', this is the hardest-hitting, most sensational, and most importantly, funniest news show ever seen. Probably."

The six-part series kicks off with a double bill tonight as 'Digger' Daley and the team lift the lid on what's happening in Great Britain and the rest of the world.

Security correspondent Jon Donovan lets his imagination run wild as he goes to Essex and Tooting, south London, to get to grips with exactly how British shopkeepers are guarding against a terrorist attack.

Plus, lifestyle reporter Mandi Manners tries to quit smoking and a debate ensues between a licensed black cabbie and an Uber driver.

Finally, entertainment correspondent Mike Armenian follows the auditions for the lead role of gay England football captain Mark Curridge.



Kayvan Novak stars in Britain Today Tonight, Friday, Channel 4, 10pm

BEST OF THE REST

**MONDAY**  
**The Island with Bear Grylls, Channel 4, 9pm**  
With old and young now living side by side, the islanders are hoping to hit their stride, but the lack of food is an ever-pressing concern and tempers are fraying. Jordan is feeling out of sorts and then has a fight with Richie, while the members of the group are furious when Phil uses some olive oil to boost the fire rather than for food.

**Little Boy Blue, ITV, 9pm**  
Family and friends attend the funeral of 11-year-old Rhys Jones is laid to rest, while a police raid at the home of Kevin Moody leads to the recovery of the gun used in the schoolboy's murder. Moody must choose between being labelled a grass and risking violent retribution or protecting the killer and facing jail time. But an unexpected result from the forensic tests on the firearm leaves the entire investigation hanging in the balance. .

**TUESDAY**  
**Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Animals – India, ITV, 9pm**  
The presenter concludes his Indian adventure with a trip to Assam, which is most famous for its tea but

is also important for wildlife – it's home to Kaziranga National Park. Paul pitches in at an animal rescue centre, where he finds himself helping to look after eight elephant calves. He also heads to a local village to learn more about how the residents and animals live side by side – and tries his hand at goat herding. Then it's on to Northern India and a rescue centre that specialises in caring for sloth bears. Paul is put on porridge duty, and discovers the animals do have a real taste for it. In fact, the job keeps him so busy he might not even have time to make it to the Taj Mahal before sunset, but there are still plenty of others sights to see when he goes out on wildlife emergency call, and is faced with a huge python.

**WEDNESDAY**  
**Madeleine McCann: 10 Years On, BBC1, 9pm**  
British toddler Madeleine McCann's disappearance 10 years ago from a holiday apartment in the resort in the Algarve region of Portugal has been investigated by police forces in two different countries – but they came up with contradictory conclusions. So what really happened to the three-year-old in Praia da Luz on the night of



Madeleine McCann: 10 Years On, Wednesday, BBC1, 9pm

May 3, 2007? Reporter Richard Bilton – who has covered the story for the BBC since the first days – examines the evidence and tracks down the men British police have questioned about the case.

**THURSDAY**  
**Mind the Age Gap, Channel 5, 10pm**  
With society apparently more divided than ever, 12 volunteers from two different generations attempt to bridge the gap. In this five-part series, no topic will be left untouched, but can a willingness to understand each other end positively or will it just open more questions about today's society? During the first dinner, an attempt at getting to know each other triggers uncomfortable debates. Tension is in the air, and gay marriage is the first topic that divides old from young. While the older group is keen to debate, the younger ones, including Naman and Jed, sense an opportunity to

party. Then, an innocent game of Guess the Celebrity quickly turns into a raging debate about the EU, in which members of all ages clash.

**FRIDAY**  
**Versailles, BBC2, 9pm**  
Princess Palatine gets a cold reception in the bed of her new husband Philippe following their marriage celebration. Meanwhile, young Sophie learns her destiny lies in an even crueler match – by order of King Louis. Elsewhere, Bontemps spots misbehaviour that suggests a new prime suspect for the poisonings to Marchal and a remark by medic Claudine echoing an earlier comment, clarifies the case. Period drama, starring George Blagden, Jessica Clark and Lizzie Brochere.

**Hospital People, BBC1, 9.30pm**  
Viewers of a certain age will recall Only When I Laugh, the ITV sitcom which left millions in stitches in the 1980s. Now this similar show is also doing a good job of tickling the funnybone. In this offering, a benevolent local businessman seeks treatment in Brimlington Hospital – much to manager Susan Mitchell's delight. The cast includes Mark Williams, Janine Duviski and Tom Binns.

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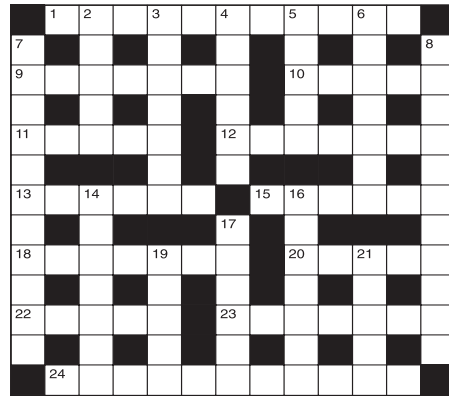


## No.427

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2. Fresh fiction (5)
3. He can look down easily on lots of people (7)
4. Almost No 1 amongst ancient cities (6)
5. Still about since a fermenting agent (5)
6. Don't touch sailor with a blemish (7)
7. Strained atmosphere while flying (4,7)
8. Dignity of ranks in countries (11)
14. Yield on one occasion in three consecutive letters (7)
16. The condition of the sufferer under treatment? (7)
17. Blooming river? (6)
19. Rise to such costume (3-2)
21. Get down to service instruction (5)



1. Knowledge (11)
9. Withdrawal (7)
10. Allude (5)
11. Flanks (5)
12. In name only (7)
13. Selected (6)
15. Calculate (6)
18. Treachery (7)
20. Consumed (5)
22. Speechify (5)
23. Speedy (7)
24. Informal (4,3,4)

2. Well known (5)
3. Superintend (7)
4. Revolt (6)
5. To drum (5)
6. Umbrage (7)
7. Suing (11)
8. Simplicity (11)
14. Outside (4-3)
16. Spire (7)
17. Invisible (6)
19. Riddle (5)
21. Lock of hair (5)

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4	5	2	6	8	3	1	7	9
3	9	8	2	7	1	5	6	4

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS:  
CRYPTIC - Across: 1 Keep left; 5 Cord;  
9 Able; 10 Strikers; 11 Order; 12 Ragtime;  
13 For the present; 18 Race card; 19 Avid;  
20 Examine; 21 Fishy; 22 Some; 23 Standard.  
Down: 2 Embargo; 3 Pretex; 4 Future perfect;  
6 One-time; 7 Dissect; 8 Single; 13 Forgers;  
14 Reclaim; 15 Hectic; 16 Seabird; 17 Neither.  
QUICK - Across: 1 Peculiar; 5 Fair; 9 Menu;  
10 Appeal; 11 Mellow; 12 Felt; 13 Fellow-  
feeling; 18 Outright; 19 City; 20 Derange;  
21 Snubs; 22 Dull; 23 Reviewer.  
Down: 2 Eremitic; 3 Unusual; 4 Apple of the eye;  
6 A priori; 7 Red flag; 8 Feeble; 13 Flooded;  
14 Literal; 15 Orient; 16 Licence; 17 Notable.

1. What do we call an invertebrate whose body is divided into head, thorax and abdomen?
2. In which country did the mazurka originate?
3. Which late comedian jokingly insulted Prince Charles at the British Comedy Awards?
4. Which colonel administrator was responsible for the acquisition and foundation of Singapore?

5. By what other name is Israel's Lake Tiberias known?
6. Who was the first monk to become archbishop of Westminster?
7. Who wrote the novel Flamingo Feather in 1955?
8. Which volcano buried Pompeii in AD 79?
9. Whose father was Robert I, known as The Devil?
10. In which city is Romeo and Juliet set?

**Quiz:** 1 Hardness of minerals; 2 Painting and Illustration; 3 Cider; 4 Lillie Langtry; 5 Duisburg; 6 Algae; 7 Unification Church; 8 Hart to Hart; 9 Milton Obote; 10 Arctic.

## Niner: BOARDINGS

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

gives an animal,  
gives a second animal,  
gives birds.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
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# Peri cool place for lunch

It's a popular high street chain and Wolverhampton Nando's has had a revamp. EMILY BRIDGEWATER checks it out

**MEDIUM, hot, or extra hot? How spicy do you like your Nando's? How hot?**

If the sub-zero temperature in Wolverhampton's revamped branch of Nando's was anything to go by, at the time we visited, then it's extra hot all the way. My two pals and I visited the popular Afro-Portuguese chain one lunchtime, shortly after it had reopened following a month-long refurb.

They've done a good job; the restaurant has been opened out and new fixtures and fittings have given its slightly tired interior a fresh lease of life. But the first thing we all comment on is the temperature – it's colder in than out. We are however, warmly greeted by a friendly member of staff who offers us a choice of tables.

## Options

And so to the menu, which everyone knows features predominately chicken plus a handful of other options for veggies and the likes.

There was talk of salads but all good intentions were thrown out and we opted for burgers, pittas and plenty of sides.

The man among us plumped for the butterfly chicken, while my friend and I sidelined the chook in favour of beanie burgers.

Orders are placed at the counter – the same guy serves me as showed us to our table, and he's as breezy and friendly as when we arrived. Full marks for pleasant staff.

Starters included hounous with peri peri drizzle and warm pitta bread strips and a trio of chicken wings spiced to your liking. Meanwhile, the main courses feature all manner of chicken dishes, from burgers to the whole she-



Nice 'n' spicy – how hot do you like your chicken at Nando's? Here it's served with spicy rice and a side salad

bang, as well as a fillet steak wrap for those who the lure of red meat is too great, and salads for those 'trying to be good'.

We start with gigantic olives and some spicy nuts although unfortunately my friend finds a hair in the latter. Add three refillable drinks and some good conversation and we're kept busy enough until our main courses arrive. The olives were fairly plump and juicy, and the nuts – a pleasing mix of cashews, almonds and macadamias – well-seasoned and moreish.

The double butterfly chicken drenched in hot sauce looked appetising, as did the two beanie burgers (both medium hot) in pitta breads, packed with crunchy shredded cabbage and carrot. Three spicy chicken wings plus sides including macho peas, coleslaw, chips, mixed salad, corn on the cob and a supergrain salad, and we tucked in with gusto.

My beanie patty in a pitta, topped with halloumi, filled a hole without being something particularly memorable. The burger fea-

tures chickpeas, sweetcorn, lentils, peas and pumpkin seeds, bound together with Cheddar cheese, although none of the ingredients particularly stood out. It all seemed a bit of a bland mush. The salad was fresh and the cheese griddled to perfection.

The chicken muncher was also underwhelmed, commenting that his bird was a bit dry. The same goes for the chicken wings, he said, mournfully. Side dishes were hits and misses. We all agreed the supergrain salad

with grains, greens, beans and an avocado and buttermilk dressing. We also liked the minty, chilli-spiked macho peas.

We managed to munch through most of it and we were left stuffed and unable to face desert despite tantalising options such as a traditional Portuguese custard tart (natas), salted caramel brownies and carrot cake.

The bill came in at £50.85 including three refillable soft drinks, which seemed reasonable for the sheer volume of food.



The newly-revamped Nando's in Queen Street, Wolverhampton

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## Spacious family homes boasts an entertainment room

**An impressive and deceptively spacious four-bedroomed detached residence in an exclusive development off Stafford Road in Westhall Gate, Bloxwich, comes with four bedrooms and a cinema/entertainment room.**

A unique residence, it is for sale through Goodchilds at £350,000 with no chain.

Deceptively spacious, this modern family home is arranged over three floors and finished to an exceptional standard. Ideally situated in a very exclusive part of Bloxwich, and having four reception rooms, it has ample space for the larger family.

The lower ground floor has a cinema/entertainment room, a cloakroom and a utility room. The ground floor consists of three reception rooms and a superb fitted breakfast kitchen whilst the first floor has two double bedrooms, a master bedroom with en-suite shower room and a main family bathroom.

Outside is an integral garage, block paved driveway allowing parking for several cars and a fully enclosed rear garden ideal for entertaining guests.

In more detail the entrance hall has stairs off to the first floor and basement levels. The lounge has a window to the front and French doors to the rear garden and a feature fireplace with an inset gas fire. The sitting room has a window to the rear.

Having French doors to the rear garden, the dining room also has double doors to the breakfast kitchen. The kitchen has wall cupboards, a range of base units with worktops over, a gas hob with extractor over, integrated double electric oven, integral dishwasher and fridge.

An inner lobby has stairs to the lower level. The laundry room has units with worktops over and under stairs storage. The utility room has wall cupboards, a range of base units with worktops over and plumbing for a washing machine. Off a hallway is bedroom four which has a window to the front and halogen down lighters. Off the first floor landing, the master bedroom is en-suite. Bedroom two has storage in the eaves. Bedroom three has storage in the eaves.

The family bathroom has a panel bath with a mixer shower on the taps.

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## Building society figures suggest home lending 'in neutral gear'

**Mortgage lending was down by nearly a fifth in March compared with a year earlier, figures from banks and building societies show.**

An estimated £21.4 billion worth of home loans were handed out last month – marking a 19 per cent decrease compared with March 2016, the Council of Mortgage Lenders (CML) said.

The CML said mortgage lending appears to be in “neutral gear” – and it does not expect the general election on June 8 to have a marked effect on lending.

The sharp year-on-year fall in lending was expected, the CML said.

In spring 2016, there had been significant increases in activity as borrowers rushed to beat a stamp duty hike that was imposed on people buying second homes, including buy-to-let investors, on April 1 2016.

The mortgage lending total for March 2017 was still a 19 per cent jump compared with the previous month, with £17.9 billion worth of home loans advanced in February.

The CML said in total, around £59.1 billion worth of mortgages were handed out in the first three months of 2017, marking a four per cent decrease on the fourth quarter of last year and a six per cent decrease on the £63 billion lent in the first quarter of 2016.

### Borrowers

CML senior economist Mohammad Jamei said: “Mortgage lending appears to be in neutral gear.

“Our gross estimate for March is £21.4 billion and this is broadly in line with average monthly lending over the past year.

“Within this aggregate level, there has been a shift towards first-time buyer and re-mortgage customers, away from home movers and buy-to-let landlords.

“We expect this profile to continue over the short term, as low mortgage rates encourage existing borrowers to re-mortgage and government schemes help first-time buyers.

“We do not expect any marked effect from the general election.”

Howard Archer, an economist at IHS Markit, said: “We share the CML’s view that June’s general election is unlikely to materially affect the housing market.

“Consequently, we believe house price gains over 2017 will be limited to no more than 2.5 per cent – and there is a very real possibility that it could come in lower than that.”

Jonathan Harris, director of mortgage broker Anderson Harris, said: “The mortgage market continues to tick along with competitive products on offer to those borrowers who are getting on with the business of buying and selling, or re-mortgaging their homes.”

# Two in five landlords in the UK are women, analysis reveals

**Women now account for two in five landlords in the UK with most female investors using property lettings as a means to topping up their monthly income from other sources, according to new research.**

An analysis of tens of thousands of landlords by Simple Landlords Insurance shows that 40% of landlords are women. By comparison, only 17% of SME owners are women which the firm believe indicates how property is moving towards equality at a faster pace than other industries.

Also, poll of over 400 landlords showed how male and female investors have different goals for their investments with 63% of female landlords saying that using rent for monthly income was their long term business goal, as opposed to long term capital growth, compared with 53% of men.

The research also found that women are more likely than men to have become accidental landlords. Some 48% of female landlords choose to be buy to let investors compared to 61% of men.

Indeed, women were more likely to have become landlords after moving in with a partner and renting out their own property or through purchasing a property for a family member to live in, such as a child attending university.

Female landlords are also likely to provide rented accommodation to a more diverse range of tenants than men. Some 35% said they would rent to housing benefit recipients, compared with 25% of men. Women were also more open to renting to pensioners, students and single employed tenants.

“As recently as 1970 women could be refused a mortgage without a male guarantor. But buying, selling, renovating, and renting property is no longer just for the boys,” said Alexandra Huntley, Simple Landlords Insurance head of operations.

“Those stereotypes are firmly consigned to history. Women have been steadily gaining ground over the last 50 years and are increasingly gaining financial independence through property investment,” she added.

The research is included in a new Women in Property Report along with real life examples and practical advice for female landlords from the Female Property Alliance. It includes the story of Bindar Dosanjh, alliance founder, who built a multi-million pound portfolio after she became a single mother and had to rent rooms to pay the bills and survive.

“For me, investing in property was about having the freedom to make choices about my life. I have made plenty of mistakes along the way but have been able to fall back on property income when I lost my job in the 2008 recession and again when I became seriously ill and was unable to work,” she said.

“Being a good communicator, a good negotiator and being good at managing people are key attributes for any landlord. They are also things women can be great at but don’t always recognise as valuable and



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## More than half of first-time buyers

**More than half of aspiring first-time buyers are feeling positive about their chances of getting on the property ladder soon, a survey has found.**

The biggest proportion of people surveyed, at 40.1%, described themselves as hopeful when asked about their ability to achieve their goal soon, while a further 16.9% said they were feeling confident – making a total of 57% who felt positive overall.

But the research, from conveyancing services provider My Home Move, also found more than a quarter (26.3%) of would-be first-time buyers felt unsure about their chances of getting on the property ladder.

A further one in 10 (10.1%) felt their hopes were unrealistic – while one in 16 (6.1%) said they felt “depressed” when asked about their prospects of owning their own home.

### Parents

Some would-be property buyers are also pinning their hopes on the “bank of mum and dad” to wholly fund their deposit.

Some 6.2% of people surveyed believed their parents would gift them enough money for a deposit, meaning they could apply for a mortgage without the need for further savings or support through a government scheme.

Nearly three quarters (72%) of

aspiring first-time buyers said they were saving for their deposits themselves. The survey of 1,000 aspiring first-time buyers also found that, when they were growing up, people tended to say they had expected to be aged around 25 to 30 when they achieved the milestone of owning their own property. Recent figures from the Council of Mortgage Lenders (CML) show the average first-time buyer taking out a mortgage in February was 30 years old.

Doug Crawford, chief executive of My Home Move, said: “Of those we surveyed, over a quarter expected to be home owners by the time they hit their mid-20s, but unfortunately the reality is very different.”

He said the findings suggest there





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In a popular and much requested location near Stafford Road, Bloxwich, this splendid appointed detached bungalow in Lydford Road is for sale through Skitts at £279,950.

With gas central heating and double glazing, this lovely property includes an extended dining kitchen with integrated appliances, complemented by a fully tiled fitted bathroom with separate shower cubicle. There is also a tandem garage and off road parking to the front.

Briefly, the property has a reception hall with a built-in storage cupboard, a front facing lounge, a superb extended breakfast kitchen/diner, dining room with French doors to the garden and a utility room, two bedrooms with fitted wardrobes and a fully tiled bathroom with a white suite including a Jacuzzi bath.

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The kitchen includes an integrated electric oven and a door to a utility room with plumbing and space for a washing machine and a door to the garden and a door to a downstairs WC. The master bedroom is en-suite.

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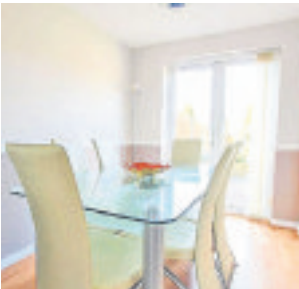
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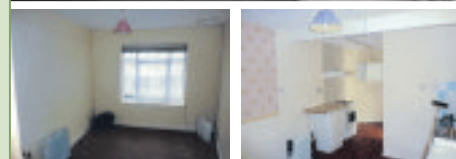




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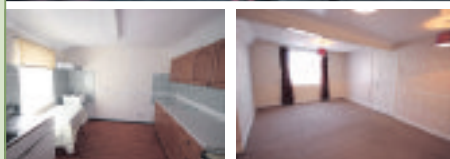
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**The Exchange, Bloxwich**

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- Separate W.C.
- Sorry No Pets
- DHSS Accepted
- Rating: 7

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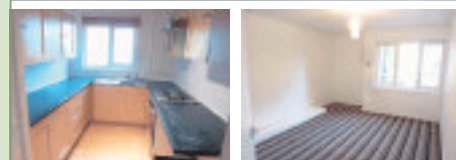
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**Valley Road, Walsall**

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- Open Plan Kitchen/Lounge
- Bathroom with Shower
- Allocated Parking Space
- Electric Heating
- Sorry No DHSS
- Rating: 69

**£495.00 PCM**



**Gleneagles Road, Walsall**

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- Entrance Hallway
- Lounge
- Kitchen / Diner
- Sorry No DHSS, Pets or Smokers

**£550.00 PCM**



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# Impressive seven seater from Skoda

By Ian Donaldson

**How gratifying it must be for Skoda – a brand always strong on value – to see customers lining up to spend more than they could get away with.**

For nearly everyone ordering a new Skoda Kodiaq, the firm's first seven seater, wants the version that sits near the top of the range, not near the bottom.

The Kodiaq (its name alluding to a bear found in Alaska) is available from £21,565 but 85 per cent of potential purchasers want posher ones costing more than £7,000 extra.

That surely signals Skoda's warranted arrival among cars that are fancied for their looks and ability more than their list price. A drive in the newcomer says the first owners of a Kodiaq made the right choice.

Longer (at 4,697mm) than both a Volvo XC60 or Audi Q5, the Kodiaq is a genuinely spacious car, with three rows of seats in the upper two trim levels (SE L and Edition) with the rearmost pair capable of comfortably seating a couple of young teenagers.

They might have to scramble past a second row of seats that slide forward but whose bases don't tilt upward, but the Kodiaq is going to be an answer for families sometimes called on to transport kids to football.

Better still, even with the third row in use there's the same amount of luggage space behind them that you might find in your average small hatchback – so enough for a decent shop. Fold all the seats down and the Kodiaq could probably house its namesake.

You can't opt for the third row in the entry level Kodiaq S and it costs £1,000 on the next grade up (SE) but almost all the early adopters are buying three-rowed versions anyway. They'll also favour a Kodiaq with a

150 horsepower 2.0 litre diesel, the same unit that does sterling service in a host of other Volkswagen Group cars, from Audi through SEAT to VW itself. It costs from £27,114 in an SE level car, equipped with a 6-speed DSG automatic gearbox. Also on offer is a 190 horsepower diesel and a trio of petrol engines, two 1.4 litres offering 125 or 150 horsepower and a more powerful 2.0 litre petrol with 180 horses. The lowest powered petrol model is the only Kodiaq available with a manual 6-speed gearbox and front wheel drive.

All the rest of the range is equipped with either an auto box or on-demand all-wheel drive, or both. They're both on parade in the current range topping Edition model, costing £34,050 and coming with the 150 horsepower diesel, whose 144g/km tailpipe emissions promise a reasonable £200 road tax hit from new under the latest Treasury revamp.

Most powerful engine at present is the 190 horsepower 2.0 litre diesel, available in a single SL L trim version for £33,110. Later in the year we'll see a Scout model with more obvious off-road looks (think plastic wheel arch extensions) and then a SportLine option too (think slightly lowered, firmed suspension and some black paint).

Without those stiffened springs the Kodiaq proved itself a delightfully comfortable companion on some indifferent roads in deepest western Britain, combining fine body control with an ability to soak up the rash of potholes and cracks our roads have succumbed to.

There's a sense of real solidity in the Kodiaq's cabin, smart enough to make you wonder how the designers at Audi make their cars look and feel worth all the extra cash.

Everything, from simplest switch to the satellite navigation system on the SE L and



The Kodiaq proved itself a delightfully comfortable companion on some indifferent roads

Edition models does its job so well you know many candles have been burned at both ends to make things just ... well, work.

The entry level S, with just a 1.4 petrol engine offered comes with LED daytime running lights, manual air conditioning, 17 inch alloy wheels, DAB radio and SmartLink to easily connect your smartphone. Up a grade, to SE and we find 18 inch alloys, cruise control, rear parking sensors, dual zone climate control and auto dimming mirrors.

The likely most popular level – SE L, tops up these goodies with sat nav, still larger (19 inch) alloys, powered tailgate, Alcantara trim and heated front seats.

Topping the Kodiaq tree, the Edition piles on leather upholstery, metallic paint and chrome roof rails. Added techno features include lane assist, high beam assist and wireless charging for a compatible mobile phone.

Depending on model, you'll also find evidence of Skoda's Simply Clever thinking,

from umbrella neatly hidden in a front door to ice scraper sitting in the fuel filler flap.

But back to the ride in an SE L 150 diesel. It's no ball of fire (9.5 seconds to 0-62mph), but plenty potent enough for satisfactory progress and quiet with it.

A journey's end 50.5mpg on the dash readout (the official average is 52.3mpg) hinted that longer term acquaintance with a Kodiaq would only cement a positive relationship with an impressive new Skoda.

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UK deliveries are expected in late summer

## XC60 is brimful of safety technology

Priced from £37,205, the XC60 is available to order now, with UK deliveries expected to start in late summer.

A choice of three engines – two diesel units and one petrol – are available, though a petrol-electric plug-in hybrid version will arrive later on in the year.

Each car is fitted with an eight-speed automatic gearbox and four-wheel drive as standard, with base D4 cars returning a claimed fuel consumption of 55.4mpg.

Even more powerful D5 versions should provide an economical drive, with Volvo claiming consumption figures of 51.4mpg.

The most powerful petrol T5, producing 250bhp, should return 39.2mpg and emit 164g/km CO2. The D4 and D5 models emit 133g/km and 144g/km CO2 respectively.

Jon Wakefield, managing director of Volvo Car UK, said: "We're incredibly excited about the brand-new XC60.

"Not only does it bring all the style and advanced technology from our larger cars to our best-selling SUV, it is the latest step in Volvo's transformation."

There are three trim levels to choose from, in the form of Momentum, R-Design and Inscription.

Even base-spec cars receive LED headlights as standard, as well as two-zone climate control and 18-inch alloy wheels.

Sporty R-Design cars receive 19-inch alloy wheels and sport suspension, alongside a gloss black front grille. Pilot Assist – Volvo's semi-autonomous drive technology – is available as an optional extra on the XC60.

# Snow drift: taking it ice and easy with racing superstars

By Rebecca Chaplin

"It's all about looking at where you need to go next and steering before you reach that point," explained Aleksi Halen as we skidded across the ice.

"Keep your movements smooth and counteract where the car is turning to keep it going in the direction you need."

Halen is a racer in the Legends series, but today he's showing me how to manoeuvre round a track etched into a frozen lake in northern Finland.

He's got the natural mix of calmness and confidence you'd expect of a Finnish racing driver who's been traversing tracks such as this since the age of six. "If we stop racing, then we stop going where we need to go," he said as the back end of the car I'm steering overtakes the rear and he forces the steering wheel in the opposite direction to realign us on the track.

Driving on ice is something you'd expect to be unnerving, but in our Seat Leon Cupra with full traction control on, you'd barely notice it. As long as you're driving carefully, that is. Push the car a little too far and, even equipped with snow tyres, you'll find yourself sliding, until the electronic stability control kicks in and narrowly saves you crashing into a snow drift.

Turn that off and it's a very different story. The car effectively becomes a giant ice skate, with traction in a straight line, but little grip as soon as you attempt to turn.

Seat has brought us to Finland where the snow is thick and the temperature is below zero to demonstrate what its 4Drive four-wheel-drive system can do in extreme weather – with the aim that it'll show us how this clever tech can benefit drivers in the far less extreme UK.

We'd try what are more conventional methods in these parts, from huskies to snowmobiles, which have been carefully honed to work in these conditions. However, Seat's SUVs and sporty hatchbacks are not what you would usually associate with snow, let alone ice.

Our day started in a far more civilised manner, testing out the car maker's latest addition to its range, the Ateca SUV, across the snowy



It seems unnatural at first to counter-steer away from the way you want to go on ice and snow

roads of Kuusamo. These family-sized cars transported us to our ice lake adventure with poise and grace.

Halen sat in the back directing me to the Juha Kankkunen Driving Academy where he works. We travelled up steep inclines through forests and bounded across the snow with surprising ease as we took in the bleak, but beautiful snowy vistas.

Kankkunen will be a name you'll recognise if you follow rallying. This Flying Finn, for those not in the know, has won the World Rally Championship four times.

So, what else would you do as one of the most famous rallying drivers in the world, but buy a frozen lake in your home country to turn into your ideal race track? And what could possibly make a better location for learning how to tackle these conditions?

Halen takes me for one lap, which seems only suitable for trained racing drivers, before pulling over and telling me to get in the driving seat. With one foot sliding underneath me the idea that I'll be driving

on this seems daunting. We try first with all of the electronic elements of the car allowed to do what they want and keep me out of the snow. He's confident I can cope, or at least that there's enough snow to cushion me and the Leon from any mistakes, and turns off the ESP.

It's unnatural at first to counter-steer away from the way you want to go, but once you get into a rhythm, it makes sense. It also helps that Halen is shouting at me to turn, brake and accelerate, which I follow diligently. To my surprise, Halen sounds vaguely impressed with what I'm doing as I turn the car into the corner on the approach before straightening it as we hit the apex to slide through the remainder and power to the next turn. "Power on to move the car to the inside and lift off to keep to the inside," is his next piece of advice as we slide around a hairpin bend.

Sure enough, by adding some power, the car carries on sideways, and as I ease off, we slow to keep tight to the apex.

To show me how it is really done, I get a trip round the circuit with World Touring Car Championship driver Jordi Gene and, the man himself, Juha Kankkunen. Modest Gene takes me round first, explaining that he'll be nowhere near as smooth as the Finn. Fearlessly, he speeds around the track, explaining that he's going for fun skids rather than the fastest time – but he could have fooled me.

Next, I get a chance to meet Kankkunen, the calmest man I've ever encountered. He acts as if he is cruising around the track, with the smallest inputs made to the steering wheel, but attacks the corners with speed. Unsurprisingly, the few laps I get with him are over extremely quickly.

I left the car feeling that I needed to move to Finland and rekindle my dream of a career as a racing driver. Although my time on the snow was short, it certainly showed me what a challenge ice driving is and gave me some insight into how to handle a car should UK roads turn arctic.

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## Keep tyre care top of the check list

With longer days and brighter skies, we love nothing more than jumping in the car for a day trip or weekend away; but before you do, check your car tyres. As the only point of contact a car has with the road, it is important that the tyres are kept in good condition.

Ring, supplier of vehicle lighting, auto electric and car accessories, suggest that there are three simple tips we can all follow to be more 'tyre aware', to prevent a blow out and get your break off to a great start.

**Pressure:** Check the tyre pressure every two weeks, and definitely before the start of any long journey.

Too much air in your tyres can be very dangerous – not only is there a chance that you won't have adequate grip on the road, but it will also increase braking distance. Not enough air and you will burn fuel quicker, reduce the level of tread sooner and risk damaging the wheels, which can be extremely costly.

Maintaining the correct level of pressure not only reduces the amount of fuel being used, but also lowers carbon dioxide emissions. Tyre pressure is so important that it can be found in three locations on a vehicle – the tyres themselves, the handbook and either in the sill of the driver's door or fuel cap. Tyres warm up when you drive artificially increasing the pressure, so ideally you should check tyre pressure at home. Keeping an air compressor to hand, such as Ring's RAC635 12V Preset Digital Compressor, will allow you to check and inflate tyres quickly and to the correct PSI.

**Tread:** If your tyres do not have the correct level of



tread they are unsafe and likely to be illegal, and could result in penalty points and a fine if you're stopped by the police.

The legal minimum tread depth for cars in the UK is 1.6mm throughout the central three-quarters of breadth of the tyre tread and around its entire outer circumference. Anything below this is unlawful and dangerous, it will reduce stopping distance when braking and risk your car skidding, especially in wet weather.

Tyre tread should be checked regularly. The easiest way to do this is by keeping a tyre gauge in the glovebox. Insert the gauge into the tread to take a reading. If it is anything near to or below the legal requirement, then you should take your car for a tyre change.

Ring has a range of analogue and digital tyre gauges suitable for checking both tread and pressure.

**Be prepared:** Follow these tips and you are less likely to suffer a blowout.

However, there is still the chance that a sharp object in the road could pierce the tyre, so it's always worth keeping a repair kit or a can of tyre sealant in the car to avoid being stranded.

Ring's RTK1 Emergency Tyre Kit has everything needed to temporarily fix a puncture without the need for tools or wheel changes. This will enable you to go to the nearest garage and prevent you from being stuck at the side of the road waiting for recovery.



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Busy times – club chairman David Robinson in front of the pavilion



The club pavilion which should be open later this year



Hands on – all hands to the deck as helpers turn out to get things ready



Cannock Cricket Club getting ready for the new season

# Howzat? Club building for brighter future

**ATTENTION** may have been centred on the start of summer action but Cannock Cricket Club are on the front foot with off-field matters.

While the first team have started their Staffs Clubs Premier Division challenge club members are looking to make major improvements to their Church Lane base.

A planning application has been submitted to build a new clubhouse separate from the main Chase Park site – which houses Cannock Hockey Club as well.

Members hope an extension will be built adjacent to the current changing rooms with volunteers having already spent more than 300 hours doing preparation work to get the area up to scratch.

## Income

Club chairman David Robinson believes, if approved, the new pavilion will prove a big boost to the club's finances.

"This pavilion will help us stand alone and will hopefully help our fundraising," Robinson said. "Like with most sports, we are very much hand-to-mouth."

"We need to do what we can to generate income and we believe this new clubhouse will do that. As well as it being a place for supporters, we want to be able to rent it out for events like anniversaries and parties."

"We are looking to generate our own revenue streams and improve the facilities for everyone connected with the club."

Robinson hopes the work will be completed by the end of the year.

## SPORTING MEMORIES

By Joseph Masi

"Club members have put in loads of hours across the winter to do as much as they can," he continued. "It's between 300 and 400 hours of work that's gone into to getting the changing rooms ready."

"What will be the new pavilion is a 1980s building and it needs bringing up to the right specifications."

"We have got rid of a lot of stuff and done as much work as we can in the existing building which we hope will become the new changing rooms and kitchen area."

"The new pavilion extension will then be attached. Of course, work has now come to a standstill as we go through the planning process."

"But fingers crossed we will get the green light as it will make a huge difference."

## Fundraising

Robinson says he expected the majority of the work to be paid for by members holding fundraising events. But the club is also looking into other revenue streams.

"We are always on the lookout for ways to generate money for the club," he added.

"We'll be putting on fundraising events and we're confident members will be able to raise the money we need. We will also look at seeing if we can apply for funds from relevant sporting bodies."

## Ricky training with a WBA champion

RICKY SUMMERS has been taking his preparations for a shot at the British light heavyweight title to world level. It has been confirmed that his rescheduled shot at title holder Frank Buglioni will take place on Saturday June 3.

It will again be at the O2 Arena in London where Summers, from Tipton, and Buglioni were first due to meet on the under-card to the clash between David Haye and Tony Bellew.

The titlist withdrew from that March 4 date after sustaining a cut in training, but Matchroom Boxing promoter Eddie Hearn has stayed true to his word that the contest will still take place.

Summers has shared a training ring with Nathan Cleverly, the Welshman who is the reigning WBA title holder and two-time world champion in the light heavyweight division.

Summers has also put another world ruler, Carl Froch, through his paces in the past as he works up towards his own night of reckoning.

He said: "Training with Nathan is ideal for me, because Frank is big at the weight although I think I'll be the naturally bigger man on the night."

"I'm just over the moon to have a second chance."

## Neal's frustration over bar on race

STOURBRIDGE'S Matt Neal has criticised the decision to bar him starting the final race of the second weekend of the British Touring Car Championship.

Three-time champion Neal is already 42 points adrift of leader Tom Ingram in the standings after a promising start to his Donington Park weekend petered out.

After qualifying fifth, Neal took second in the first race and seventh in the second before a premature end to the third.

Having taken the lead at the first start, Neal aquaplaned off the circuit.

He was pushed out of the gravel by the marshals and took up his front-row position for the restart, only to be told he couldn't race after receiving 'outside assistance'.

But Neal said: "If the race stops before the leader has done two laps it's declared a no contest and all available cars can restart the race."

It's something we've got to take up now."

## Davies is keeping true to his weight

TIVIDALE'S Ryan Davies plans to remain at welterweight as he makes the transition from kickboxer to paid pugilist. The 24-year-old is preparing to become a pro with a four-round bow against Matthew Ashmole in Birmingham tomorrow.

He features on Errol Johnson's BCB Promotions bill at the Icknield Road fight scene, in the Edgbaston area of the Second City. The show has been titled Heavy Artillery. Davies comes into the code under the tutelage of another former kickboxer, Tyler Shakespeare, who has also brought Kyle Williams across the sports.

And Davies said: "It's a new challenge, but guts is my game and I want that title. I live the gym and I'm always on it, getting as fit as I can be. You can outwork an opponent in any sport and I don't think many opponents will be able to match me for my engine and desire. I'm training harder now than I ever have in kickboxing, because I want to do as well as I possibly can in boxing. My ambitions are high, but so is my dedication."

The main event of 'Heavy Artillery' will see Wolverhampton's Josh Burke and Coventry's Dilly Singh contest the vacant British Challenge cruiserweight title over eight rounds.





## Wood stall as the drop looms near

### Walsall Wood 1 Heanor Town 3

WOOD needing just a point for safety went down to an Elliott Reeves hat-trick. With Alvechurch stuttering to a draw to take the title at lowly Shawbury United it means that if the Shropshire side win at relegated Brocton next Saturday and Wood lose at Westfields it will be Wood who are relegated on goal difference.

It was Wood who had the better of the early exchanges but it was the visitors who threatened first, Sean Roulston breaking up a Wood attack and finding Dominic Wilkinson wide right to run on and release Man of the Match Elliott Reeves into the right of the box, his low drive was half stopped by keeper Adam Jenkins and Drew Ricketts calmly completed the clearance.

It was Reeves on 17 minutes, riding a challenge as he raced into the right of the box, there was no appeal but inexplicably the referee blew for a penalty. Reeves calmly slotted the spot kick home.

Right on the stroke of half time a left wing corner found hot shot Reeves who swept home number two.

On 61 minutes a lovely move by Wood, through the centre ended with Leon Taylor finding Lewis Taylor Boyce on the right of the box, he ran on played a neat one-two with Molesworth before beating the advancing Joe McCormack as he raced from his line.

On 76 minutes later Reeves ran through from halfway left of centre, he went through a strong challenge, the ball bouncing kindly for him to run on into the box to calmly slide home number three, completing his hat-trick in the process. The goal knocked the stuffing out of Wood, but on 90 minutes a long ball forward into the centre of the box found Taylor, he was strong to hold the ball up but was crowded out by a posse of defenders.

## Villa keep hopes of survival alive with superb show

### Lichfield City 1 Pelsall Villa 3

PELSALL Villa kept their hopes of avoiding relegation alive with a superb team performance against Lichfield City on Saturday.

Right from the off Villa harried their hosts and good work by Tom Green up front resulted in a defensive error which lead to Ryan Wilkins slotting home. The visitors were soon two up with a great passing move out of midfield leaving Wilkins to score his second.

Lichfield pulled a goal back late in the first half but Pelsall held firm until half time.

Liam Degville and Tan Katsukunya controlled the midfield throughout the second half, with Wilkins and Osiris Robertson supporting Green in attack at every opportunity.

Villa got their third goal with 20 minutes to go, substitute Ryan Roberts winning the ball on the right and crossing for Wilkins to complete his hat-trick.

Pelsall go into their last game of the season on Saturday away at Studley looking for a win that could keep them in the division.

## Bloxwich in impressive home finish

### Bloxwich RFC 54 St Leonards RFC 14

THE last home game of a fine season saw Bloxwich finish in style, with an impressive display.

However, it was St Leonards who started stronger and deservedly stunned the home side with the two opening scores of the game to take a 0-14 lead.

Bloxwich caught their breath and soon began to put the visitors under pressure.

A well taken line out saw Bloxwich lock Craig Jones control the ball at a well set Maul, and drive to the line for a powerfully worked try to make the score 5-14.

### RUGBY

Bloxwich started to be more dominant with possession and were rewarded when Sean Bottomer was able to cut a good line against a stretched defence for a second try for the home side. This narrowed the gap to 10-14 at half time.

Coach Paul Coyne made some changes for the second half, with immediate impact being dealt.

This came in the form of two bone crunching tackles from Adam Bowater, which were felt all the way back to the clubhouse.

This set the tone for a seven try haul in a ram-

pant second half from Bloxwich. Skipper Richard Geary crossed the line for two of the scores as did number eight Jack Hunt.

Sean Bottomer also doubled his tally. Gareth Maclean sniffed an interception for one of his own, whilst his brother Martin Maclean set up a fine try for Brad Russell with a deft and disguised off load totally fooling the opposition. Bloxwich 2nds put in a fine display away at a well-equipped Willenhall, and can consider themselves unlucky not to have come away with a victory for their display.

Next week Bloxwich travel to Bishops Castle for the final game of the season.

## Real game of 2 halves with teams

### Camp Hill 24 Walsall 17

THIS was a contest that became a traditional 'game of two halves'. The hosts knew that they needed a bonus point win to guarantee an end of season play-off position. They therefore attacked at every opportunity and had the ideal start as they drove over for a try after only seven minutes.

Camp Hill, eventually, got their second try after their scrum became under pressure. But they managed to scramble the ball away and a missed tackle resulted in an easy fifteen metre run for the touchdown.

Just three minutes later the hosts scored their third try, in similar circumstances, with this again coming from a scrum that was under pressure. This gave the hosts a 19 - 0 lead with injury time being played at the end of the first half, there was one more to come, to make it a bonus point secured by the end of half time.

The visitors used the slope on the Sharmans Road pitch to good effect

during the second half and it was pleasing to see the team being confident to run and pass the ball at every opportunity. It did result in two more scores, but they should have really scored far more. Walsall should have secured at least one score from the numerous line-outs that they had close to the Camp Hill try line. But, credit to the opposition, as they successfully overturned possession on every occasion.

Walsall made it a very nervous final quarter for the hosts after good handling from defence by Wood, Ford and Crowhurst.

## Pics pick up first win in 10 games

**Halesowen Town 1 Rushall Olympic 2** RUSHALL recorded their first win in 10 games with just local pride at stake in the final game of the season.

The visitors broke up field from Danny Bragoli's free-kick to snatch a 15th minute lead when lively Stan Mugisha slotted past goalkeeper Dan Platt.

Halesowen's Andre Johnson punished the Pics profligacy by levelling in the final minute of the first half with a fine finish past goalkeeper Jose Veiga to claim Halesowen's first goal in six outings.

Early in the second period substitute Marcus Jackson struck the home crossbar. But the Pics soon regained their lead with a 69th minute winner after Partodikomo laid the ball off for Banister to drill home from the edge of the area and Rushall ran down the clock to complete their season on a high.

★★★

The Chronicle, a Midland News Association Ltd publication, printed by the company at Ketterly, Telford. Thursday, April 27, 2017



**SCOTT LAIRD** could have played his last game for Walsall after boss Jon Whitney confirmed, ahead of the Port Vale match, that he wouldn't feature in the final two games of the season.

The defender has become a popular figure at the Banks's Stadium since initially joining the Saddlers on loan from Scunthorpe back in August.

Laird has scored four goals in 31 appearances for Jon Whitney's side and said last month he hopes to make his move to Walsall permanent in the summer. But that now looks unlikely with Whitney dropping him against Port Vale as well as the season finale against MK Dons.

"I spoke to Scott on Friday and told him he won't be involved in the remaining games," Whitney said. "I'm going to try to get some of my kids on the bench."

"I wanted to get Kory Roberts on the bench instead of Laird for the Coventry game."

"Laird is fine with that. He isn't my player and they are the decisions I have got to make."

Whitney was far from pleased with his players following their lacklustre display in Saturday's 1-0 defeat at Coventry.

And he warned his more established players that nobody is guaranteed a place for the next two games.

"Some of them have let their shirts go," the boss said.

"I want to try and give these fans two games to be optimistic about. For that you can't have the energy levels we showed at Coventry."

"I understand there are a few tired legs but come and tell me if you're tired. Let somebody else play. There are two games left and we have to respond."

"There are some little things I noticed on Saturday and there will be some stern words said. A few people will have to be accountable."

"I shouldn't be telling my substitutes to go and warm up after 15 minutes. I want to see if they look me in the eye and tell me why we failed to meet the standards we've set."



The ball ends up in the back of the Walsall net for Coventry's winning goal on Saturday

## New name on cup as West Brom leads way

A NEW name will be engraved on the Williamson Trophy at the end of the 2017 season following second-round wins by West Bromwich Dartmouth, Ombersley, Berkswell and Walmley.

West Brom will host Ombersley in the semi-finals after overcoming Shrewsbury, who were

skittled for 67, in 28.2 overs at Sandwell Park. Liam Banks took 3-7 for Dartmouth then joined skipper Kadeer Ali (32)

in an opening stand of 53 to put Shrewsbury out of their misery. Banks finished unbeaten on 33.

The match between Worcestershire rivals Ombersley and Kidderminster turned into a

thriller with the home side winning by losing less wickets - despite 78 from Connor Smith.

Trophy holders Walsall bowed out to Berkswell, who will host Walmley in the last four. Luke Stynes took 3-34 as Berkswell recorded 265-7. In reply, Walsall never looked likely to threaten, all out for 188.

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## Could you be the future of Fostering?

Fostering has changed my life – it's the best thing I've ever done. I feel that I'm the lucky one. My three children are a gift and I really can't imagine our home without them – Mandy, foster carer.

Proud  
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Foster Care Fortnight is Fostering Network's national campaign to promote awareness of fostering and to recruit more foster carers. Walsall Council is proud to support Foster Care Fortnight #FCF2017

## Tom & Sharon:

**My husband and I fostered for many years, caring for children of all ages, cultures and religions. In 2005 we were asked to have a Vietnamese boy, Thu, aged 10. Thu had been found living alone for a number of days. He arrived at our home with nothing more than the school uniform he had on.**

Thu could only speak a little English when he came to us but he quickly picked up the language and settled into our home. Working hard at school, he soon caught up with other children of the same age. We decided to care for Thu long term. He was loved by all the family and, in turn, Thu loved them. There was never any mention of

his mother and no contact was made. We tried to make contact with another Vietnamese family to teach Thu about his culture but we were told that due to the North and South divide they could not help as it could put Thu in danger.

Thu always did as he was asked, never sulking or arguing if told no. In school, he had a few ups and downs, but worked hard to achieve the best. He was part of many teams including rugby and an adult's Australian football team. He also ran mini marathons in aid of cancer charities.

After joining the Navy Cadets at 12, Thu decided upon a career in the Navy as a chef, but was turned down when he applied at aged 17, due to his nationality. We were so disappointed for him, but he picked himself up

and began work as a trainee chef. However, in 2014, he had a phone call from the Navy inviting him back for an interview. We were delighted! In June 2015 the whole family cheered him on at his passing out parade.

Thu was 18 when his mom contacted him, via letter. He agreed to meet her and learned that he had a nine year old sister, which was a shock to him but something he was also pleased about! Together, we overcame any language or cultural obstacles over the years and Thu is now enjoying his dream career in the Navy. We are all so proud of what he has achieved and the many hurdles overcome to get there. It's been a pleasure to care for Thu and he is a pleasant, well rounded and affectionate person and a treasured member of our family.

"We all have giants.....  
but some giants are smaller than others."

Siblings Jack & Ellie are introduced to their new foster family.

**Find out who their giants are by visiting**

Facebook/ [fosteringinwalsall](https://www.facebook.com/fosteringinwalsall) or [www.fosteringinwalsall.co.uk](http://www.fosteringinwalsall.co.uk)

**Wednesday 6th May 2017, 3.00pm**

**#KeepThemTogether #FosterForYourLA**





I've always received great support, especially when I had placement difficulties. 'The Skills to Foster' training is excellent - it really prepares you. - Mandy, foster carer.

## Paula & Mark

**My wife and I have been fostering for almost two years. We were recently involved in helping a little boy return to the care of his birth family**

J came to us on a Friday evening, aged 13 months old, with bags of clothes, toys and medication. There were concerns about his physical development and speech delay. Despite this J settled with us and seemed content from the first night. As dad lived out of the area, our initial contact with J's birth family was with mom. J gained confidence in our home, quickly starting to walk, his vocabulary grew by the week and his asthma improved. His father had requested contact visits and made the long journey each week to see

J. Following careful assessments of both J's parents, the social workers involved decided that he would be safe and happy living with dad. It was impractical for dad to leave his family for a couple of weeks to be with us to observe J's waking, lunchtime and bedtime routines, so we agreed take J to where his dad lived and stay nearby in a cottage for a week to support the transition for everyone.

After the initial unfamiliarity of being in a new home environment with his dad and stepmom, J relaxed and started to play with his little brother. By the middle of the week J was enjoying periods of time with his family without us being there. On the final day we played with J at our cottage and effectively said our own goodbyes before taking him to his dad's house where he would now live. We stayed

in the area for a few days afterwards and although we exchanged phonecalls with dad and stepmom we were satisfied that J had settled and so returned home.

The professionals involved praised our commitment in supporting J's transition. We just had J's best interests at heart and we were pleased that we spent time with him at his new home, giving us the re-assurance that he was safe and happy. There can be a perception that children in foster care don't always get to return to their own family but we were proud that we could be a part of reuniting J with his dad and that the time we all invested helped to make the transition as smooth as possible. We wouldn't have changed a thing.

## Liam, aged 13 - Member of a fostering family

**Since my parents became foster carers I have been able to understand and appreciate what some children go through. I have so much empathy for them and I know that while they live with us they will be looked after very well.**

I love to help my mom with the little ones and play with them, with their toys. I enjoy showing the older children how to use a computer, as I am a bit of a geek! I can usually make the little ones laugh and giggle and I love to read to them. I realise that the children look to me as a big brother, and I try to conduct myself in a way that reflects a role model for them.

The only downside of fostering, for me, is when the children move on or return to birth family. I really do find this upsetting and will openly cry. This makes me feel like we have had a loss in the family, because they are all treated as part of our family. My experience as a foster brother has made me realise that I would like to work within this field of either foster carer, social work or support work with children.

Fostering, for me, is a positive experience. I admire the children that we have looked after because I know if I was taken away from my family, I don't think I would cope. My mom is constantly amazed how quickly the children adapt into our family and always asks me to put myself in their

shoes for a day! I still enjoy my quality time with my mom and dad and extended family and they make sure that this happens regularly.

I would have loved a younger brother but unfortunately my parents were unable to give me that, but they gave me the experience of 37 foster brothers and sisters! I've had a permanent foster sister for almost 6 years. There's typical sibling rivalry, and we don't get on all of the time, but I'm always happy to help her with homework and at least I have someone that in future years I can turn to..... hopefully!!!



# I've often thought about fostering but....

We hear this so often, but the truth is that lots of people are eligible to foster. If you have a spare bedroom at home, have time in your life to care for a child and want to make a positive difference to a young person's life, then we would like to hear from you! There are many myths about fostering and people often rule themselves out before finding out more, so we have explored some of the common myths below.

## I'm single, I can't foster -

You can be single, living with a partner, married or from the LGBT community. It's helpful if you have a supportive network of family or friends around you too.

## I can't work and foster -

It depends how many hours you work, how flexible your current employer is and on the ages and needs of the children you foster. We pay allowances to cover your household costs and an additional amount for each child you foster. Some employers, including Walsall Council, have a Family Friendly policy which may provide flexibility and support if you decide to become a foster carer.

## I don't have children of my own -

You don't need to have your own children to be a good foster carer. Time spent caring for nieces, nephews or working or volunteering with children will be valuable experience too. In addition to ongoing support from your dedicated supervising social worker there is lots of training to develop your skills and knowledge.

## I'm too old to foster -

There's no upper age limit for foster carers! As long as you are fit and able to care for a child then there is no official age where you are 'too old' to foster. We have excellent carers of all ages, including those in their sixties.

## I don't own my home -

You can live in either rented or owned accommodation. If you are a tenant then your landlord just needs to confirm to us that they are happy for you to foster. It's important that each child you care for has their own bedroom, a space just for them.

## I've got pets -

We understand that your pets are part of your family and we will include your cat or dog in our assessment, looking at their temperament and behaviour, to make sure that you are all ready to foster. Having pets can also be beneficial to the children in your care.

# Join us during Foster Care Fortnight 2017

Walsall Council need more foster carers to look after local children. Are you ready to find out more about fostering for Walsall Council? Come and meet some of Walsall's fostering team and foster carers during our Foster Care Fortnight events below.

Monday 8th May  
10.00am - 4.00pm  
Saddlers Shopping Centre,  
Walsall  
WS1 1YS \*

Tuesday 9th May  
10.00am - 12.30pm  
'Open House' coffee morning.  
Walsall Foster Carer's  
Association,  
28 New Forest Road,  
WS3 1TR \*

Thursday 11th May  
1.00pm - 3.30pm  
Darlaston Library,  
1 King Street,  
Walsall,  
WS10 8DE

Friday 12th May  
12.00pm - 2.00pm  
Council House,  
Lichfield Street,  
Walsall,  
WS1 1UZ

Saturday 13th May  
9.00am - 11.00am  
Walsall Arboretum  
Visitor's Centre,  
Walsall Arboretum,  
WS4 2BU \*

Monday 15th May  
3.30pm - 6.00pm  
Palfrey Children's Centre,  
South Street,  
Walsall,  
WS1 4HE \*

Tuesday 16th May  
11.00am - 1.30pm  
Manor Hospital,  
Pleck Road,  
Walsall,  
WS2 9PS

Wednesday 17th May  
4.30pm - 6.30pm  
Essington Lodge,  
106 Essington Road,  
Willenhall,  
WV12 5EX \*

Thursday 18th May  
4.00pm - 6.30pm  
Pelsall Village Centre,  
High Street,  
Pelsall,  
WS3 4LX \*

Friday 19th May  
10.00am - 12.30pm  
Brownhills Library,  
Park View Centre,  
Chester Road North,  
WS8 7JB

You can speak with Walsall foster carers at the events marked with a \*

Call on 0800 923 3706

Website: [www.fosteringinwalsall.co.uk](http://www.fosteringinwalsall.co.uk)

Email: [fosteringinwalsall@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:fosteringinwalsall@walsall.gov.uk)



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